

Sri Krishna

THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR

K.R. VAIDYANATHAN



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN,
MUMBAI-400 007.



आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I.89.-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

General Editor

S. RAMAKRISHNAN

195

**SRI KRISHNA
THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR**

By

K. R. VAIDYANATHAN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

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THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR**

K.R. VAIDYANATHAN



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*Dedicated in grateful and
ever-loving memory to my father,
late Shri K.M. Ramakrishna Iyer
and mother,
late Smt. Lakshmi Ammal
who inspired me in this work of devotion*

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Adi Sankaracharya who established the puja routine
at Guruvayur temple



Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati

HIS HOLINESS SR
SRI KANCHI KAMAKOTI PEETADHIPATHI

JAGADGURU SRI SANKARACHARYA SWAMI HUTT
KANKEEPURAM.

Kan.cheepuram. 2

Date 21.1.1973.

His Holiness appreciates the attempt of Sri K.R. Valdivyanathan to give a full account of the Lord of Guruvayur in his book to enable the reader to fully understand the greatness of the Lord.

His Holiness hopes that the book will be read by a large section of humanity and that they will endear themselves to "Sri Krishna - The Lord of Guruvayur."

By order
A.S. Bhanu Panth
(A.S. BHANU PANTH)
Manager.

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which

human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita*, by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, con-

taining a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethic relations, and speculative thought on human problem that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, likely belonging to K. M. Munshi, written in a cursive style.

PREFACE

Aum Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya

The purpose of temple-going and making votive offerings to deities is not merely to find an answer to the problems of day-to-day life. It has the higher aim of instilling in man devotional love for the Lord; this is bhakti, acclaimed by the wise as the easiest path to realise God in this degenerate age of Kali.

Nowhere else do you see bhakti demonstrated more feelingly than at Guruvayur, the abode of Lord Krishna or Guruvayurappan, as the deity is popularly known. Like Tirupati, Guruvayur has in recent times emerged as a pilgrim centre of all-India fame.

No comprehensive account of the temple is available in English, particularly for the benefit of devotees from outside Kerala. An attempt has been made in this book to fill this gap.

I have collected and collated material from a number of sources. These have been acknowledged at appropriate places by way of foot-notes. Special mention must, however, be made of some: (1) The articles entitled "*The Glory of Guruvayur*" by well-known historian, the late Prof. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, which were serialised in the 1964 issues of *The Kalyana Kalpataru* and his research papers on the history of Guruvayur; (ii) *Sri Guruvayurappan*, a monthly magazine, published by Sree Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust, Guruvayur; (iii) *Narayaniyam* (The Gospel of Guruvayur) of poet-saint Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri with an English com-

mentary by Shri P.N. Menon published by Educational Supply Depot, Palghat Kerala; (iv) *Narayaniyam*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda and published by Shri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. (v) *Sree Guruvayurappan Temple Renovation Souvenir*, 1974; and (vi) *Bhaktapriya*, a spiritual monthly, both published by Guruvayur Devaswom; (vii) *The arts and Crafts of Kerala*, Paico Publishing House, Cochin and (viii) *Temples of South India*, The Publications Division, Government of India. I am grateful to the authors/editors of these publications.

I had also consulted that great savant and devotee of Guruvayurappan, the late Brahmashri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri and the late Shri K.K. Menon, who was special officer and secretary, Guruvayur Temple Renovation Committee. I owe a debt of gratitude to them as well as to the Administrator, Guruvayur Devaswom who readily supplied information regarding puja routine, offerings, amenities to pilgrims etc for inclusion in the Appendix.

R.G.K former Assistant Editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and a popular columnist, guided me throughout and offered valuable suggestions by going through the manuscript critically. I am ever grateful to him for giving me freely of his time.

I offer my respectful obeisance to Jagdguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham who graciously blessed my humble effort by granting a Sri Mukham (Benedictory message).

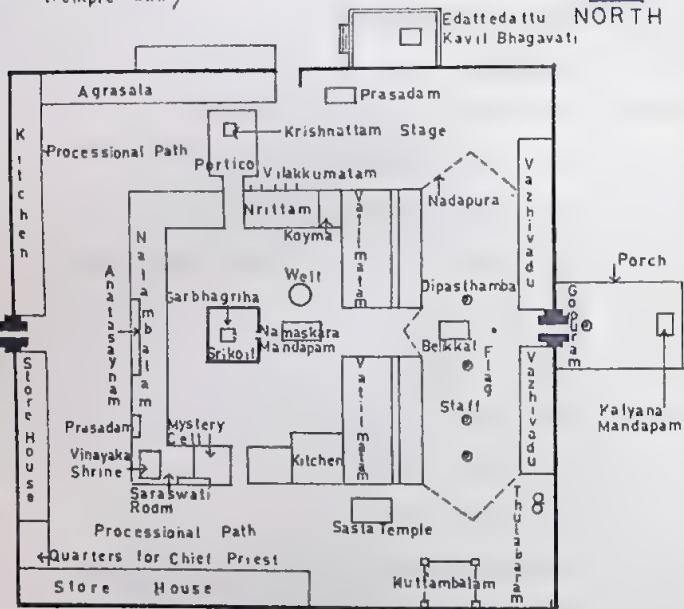
6th December 1992
Guruvayur Ekadasi

K.R. Vaidyanathan

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RUDRATIRTHA
(Temple Tank)



PLAN OF THE SRI KRISHNA TEMPLE GURUVAYUR.
(DRAWN BY Ms. RUPA SHAH)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sri Krishna took birth in the city of Mathura, on the banks of the Yamuna, probably three thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The purpose of his avatara or descent to earth was to destroy adharma and to reveal to the world the splendour of God. He is called Purnavatara of Vishnu, that is, the full manifestation of the Lord Supreme, as contrasted with the other incarnations which were only partial revelations of the God-head.

Even as a boy, Sri Krishna performed many marvellous deeds that testified to His being God incarnate on the earth. The destruction of the demoness Putana, the revelation of His cosmic form, Viswarupa, as He opened His mouth to His fostermother, Yasoda, the lifting up of the mountain Govardhana, the overcoming of Kaliya, the serpent who fouled the waters of the Yamuna, the devouring of the forest conflagration and, to crown it all, His amorous dalliance with the Gopis are some of the wondrous acts of His early boyhood – acts that indicated how He combined human and divine traits.

In later years, He proved Himself a dauntless warrior, an unsurpassed statesman and a world teacher. He slew Kamsa and many other wicked demons. As Arjuna's charioteer he took a leading part in the great battle of Kurukshetra where He delivered His eternal message of

the Bhagavad Gita. He proved His statesmanship by acting as peace-maker between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and by founding the city of Dwaraka and being its wise ruler. Lastly, as spiritual guide and preceptor, He taught the supreme truths of Yoga, Bhakti and Jnana to Arjuna and Uddhava and through them to all mankind.

What happened to the Lord when He departed after fulfilling the purpose of His avatara? That beauteous form with all the auspicious marks in which He manifested Himself in flesh and blood to the people of His time is preserved for all time in the sanctified idols of our temples. Among the more famous of these shrines is Guruvayur, known as "Bhooloka Vaikuntha", where the Lord reveals Himself to His devotees in the same majestic form in which He welcomes them in Vaikuntha, His celestial abode.

The glory of Guruvayur was revealed by sage Datatreya to King Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit. According to the sage, the image of Guruvayur was originally worshipped by Narayana. He narrated how it came to be worshipped by Krishna Himself at Dwaraka, how it was rescued from the great deluge and finally installed at Guruvayur to protect mankind from the evils of Kaliyuga. The story is narrated in detail in Chapter II.

This is how the 16th century savant and poet Mepattur Narayana Bhattatiri describes the greatness of the Lord of Guruvayur in the opening stanza, *Saandranandaavabodhaatmakam...* of his immortal work, *Narayaniyam*: "Oh! blessed indeed is mankind, for in the temple of Guruvayur there shines, in all its effulgence,

the Supreme Brahman itself, which is the ultimate goal of all human endeavour; which shines through a hundred thousand scriptures and yet remains indistinct; which is ever free; which is devoid of the limits of time and space; which is incomparable; and which is the crystallised essence of Bliss and Knowledge."

The glory of the image which is said to be not of earthly origin, is revealed in other slokas too wherein is mentioned "that Lord infused His own glory into the image to help His devotees in their devotion, to raise them from the worldly miseries of the iron age, to cure the afflicted of their maladies and bless them with sound health and prosperity".

Legend has it that King Janamejaya became a victim of leprosy. He performed austerities at Guruvayur at the instance of sage Dattatreya and was cured. There are many other accounts that testify to the healing power of the deity. Reports are heard, even in these days of skepticism, about cures effected by the grace of Guruvayurappan or favours granted by Him. Saints and savants through the ages, like Adi Sankaracharya in the 8th century down to Sri Narayana Bhattatiri, Sri Poontanam Nambudiri and Vilvamangalam Swamiyar have added to the sanctity of the spot by offering worship to Guruvayurappan.

The glory of Guruvayur – the place has also come to be justly known as the Dwaraka of the South – thus rests on the divinity of the idol installed there which represents the full manifestation of the Lord Mahavishnu as was revealed to Vasudeva and Devaki at the time of Krishnavatara; it is that attractive, world-enchanting

form of Sri Krishna endowed with the four lustrous arms carrying the conch, the discus, the mace and the lotus. Adorning Himself with the divine *tulasi* garland and pearl necklaces, the Lord here appears in all radiance. His eyes stream forth the milk of compassion and kindness.

The very atmosphere of the temple elevates one's soul. As Kulapati Munshiji recorded the memories of his visit to holy Guruvayur in one of his letters in the *Bhavan's Journal*: "One could hear nothing but the chanting of the name of the Lord from the innermost recesses of the heart of the devotees. As I went round the *prakaras*, I could see no idlers and gossip-mongers. Groups of persons went round the different minor shrines in a business-like manner. A couple of men were reciting the *Narayaniyam*. At the portico I could see devotees fulfilling their vows with coconuts, plantains etc. On one side, young couples were giving their children the first official food – *annaprasana*. Yet, at another, many people, young and old, were lining up for fulfilment of *Thulabharam* vows. What a faith!"

This then is the picture of Guruvayur. In terms of the devotion it evokes and the offerings in cash and kind it receives, it ranks next only to Tirupati*. It may not boast of any architectural grandeur or of great historical importance. But in divinity, sanctity and cleanliness this small unpretentious shrine has hardly any equal.

Set amid the swaying coconut palms, Guruvayur has the scenic beauty characteristic of Kerala. The city

* According to the report of the Hindu Religious Endowments commission headed by the late Dr.C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar (1962), the annual income of Guruvayur temple was Rs. 8.87,045. The income now runs into crores.

dweller can combine holiday and devotion here. The place is administered by a township committee. It has basic amenities such as good drinking water, clean roads, sanitation and hospitals. A few day's stay in this holy of holies will prove invigorating both physically and spiritually and help us to forget the cares of the work-a-day world.

How does one reach Guruvayur? The place is 29 kms from Thrisoor (Trichur) on the Madras-Kochi line of the Southern Railway. With the construction of the Thrisoor-Guruvayur railway line Guruvayur has come on the railway map. To those who come from the north side of Kerala (from Mangalore etc.) Kuttipuram is the nearest rail head.

Coimbatore, Kochi and Kozhikode (Calicut) are the air terminals from where one can reach Guruvayur by road.

There are bus services connecting Guruvayur with all important towns in Kerala and the neighbouring Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The vehicles terminate in the vicinity of either the eastern or western gate of the temple. The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus station is about 200 metres from the western gopuram, while the private bus station is close by Manjula on eastern side. One will have therefore no difficulty in locating the shrine.

Even otherwise one always hears the full throated cries of "Hare Krishna", "Narayana" "Guruvayurappa" from the surging mass of devotees - and the visitor becomes one among the eager to step into the temple to

have the electrifying vision of the Lord of all Gods who is always ready to come to the succour of His devotees.

All round the temple there are ever so many lodges and hotels where the pilgrims can put up at moderate cost. The Guruvayur Devaswom also provides several amenities to pilgrims.

For booking, and any other information about the temple, one may contact: The Administrator, Guruvayur Devaswom, Guruvayur-680 101 Thichur District, Kerala. Phone: 6335. STD Code : 04889

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN

The origin of the Guruvayur shrine is lost in antiquity. The *Gurupavanapura-Mahatmya* which forms part of the *Narada Purana* alludes briefly to its history and sanctity. The story goes that King Janamejaya, son of Parikshit, wished to avenge his father's death which was brought about by the deadly Takshaka, a Naga Chief. He accordingly performed a sarpa yajna (snake sacrifice) in which thousands of innocent reptiles perished.

As a result of the victims' curse he became afflicted with leprosy. The disease manifested itself at the very touch of his bride, Jyotishmati of Avanti, on the very day of their marriage. He obtained no relief from medicines. In despair he was on the point of taking his own life when the sage Dattatreya appeared before him. Moved by the king's sufferings, the sage suggested a remedy: propitiation of the Lord Krishna at Guruvayur. He then revealed to the monarch the glory of that deity.

"The image at Guruvayur," said Dattatreya, "is exactly like Narayana, and Narayana himself was the first to worship it." At the beginning of the Padma Kalpa. He gave it to Brahma and it was by the grace of this deity that he was able to carry out his allotted task of creation.

At the beginning of the Varaha Kalpa, Sutapa and Prisni who had no children, prayed to Brahma for the gift

of a son. The creator gave them the image and said that their wish would be fulfilled by worshipping it. Pleased with their sincere and deep devotion, Lord Mahavishnu Himself appeared before them. Three times they asked Him for a son and every time He said, "Be it so" and added that He would be born to them as their son at three successive births and they would have the good fortune of worshipping the divine image too during all the three *janmas*.

In due course, Prisni gave birth to a son, who was named 'Prisnigarbha'. In their second life, as Kasyapa and Aditi, the couple worshipped the same image. The Lord incarnated Himself as Vamana in order to humble the demon king Bali who was a threat to the gods.

Kasyapa and Aditi were born as Vasudeva and Devaki in their third life. They received the image from Dhaumya and through its grace Sri Krishna was born to them. After slaying Kamsa, Krishna moved to Dwaraka where He built a temple in which He installed the image of the Supreme Himself and worshipped it after the death of His parents.

When the time came for His *swargarohanam*, or ascent to Vaikuntha, Lord Krishna told His foremost disciple and devotee Uddhava that the purpose of His avatara was over and that He would soon depart. Uddhava was plunged in grief thinking of the terrible fate that would befall the world in Kaliyuga during His absence. The Lord pacified His bhakta by saying that He would manifest Himself in the idol and shower His blessings on His devotees and ward off the evil effects of Kaliyuga. He asked Uddhava to take good care of the image during the impending submergence of Dwaraka in

the sea and install it at a spot equally holy in consultation with Brihaspati (Guru), the preceptor of the Gods.

Accordingly, Brihaspati accompanied by his disciple, Vayu, the God of the winds, arrived at Dwaraka. Sri Krishna had already departed for Vaikuntha and Varuna, the Sea-God, was in occupation of Dwaraka. The image itself was being tossed in the sea by the surging waves. At the suggestion of Guru and Vayu, Varuna withdrew. The Wind God carried the image on his head and both set out in search of a sacred place for its installation.

They wandered through lands in the North like Kuru and Panchala, Kashi, Kosala, Videha and Magadha, Anga and Vanga, and in the South through the kingdoms of Andhra and Chola in search of a suitable site. At last, as they were entering Kerala through the Palakkad gap, they were met by Parasurama who had created Kerala and who himself was going to Dwaraka in search of the very image they were bringing!*

We must now digress to explain how Parasurama was on the look-out for the image. Rheumatism was a common affliction with people in those times. Unable to bear the suffering they journeyed together to Parasurama's *mulasthan*a or headquarters at Thrisoor and appealed to him to afford them some means of relief. At the same time the sage Narada happened to pass through Thrisoor. He was deeply moved by the sight of such a vast assembly of rheumatics writhing in pain. He advised Parasurama to bring the image which Sri Krish-

* *Glory of Guruvayur*, "K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *Kalyana Kalpataru*, August 1964.

na had worshipped at Dwaraka and install it in the most sacred spot in Kerala. By worshipping the image, Narada said, people would be cured of the malady.

Parasurama now led the way for Guru and Vayu and they all came near a beautiful lake full of lotuses. On one side of it there were Siva and Parvati to welcome them. The lake was none other than Rudratirtha where Siva taught the *Rudragita* to Prachetas. "This place," said Siva to them, "was marked out long ago for the image of Narayana; I shall most gladly leave Rudratirtha and live with Parvati at Mammiyur on the opposite bank."

Sprinkling the holy waters of the Rudrakupa (the temple well near the *Ardhamandapa* or porch in front of the central shrine) on the image and offering worship to it, Siva turned to Guru and Vayu and said, "You two together should perform the installation; as you are the founders of this sacred temple, this place shall be known as Guruvayupura." This term from which the present name is derived finds expression in the following sloka:

Surāchārya tvayanena vayunā cha nimittatah

Arabdhametatksetram syat guruvayupurabhidham

Blessing them all, Siva left for Mammiyur. This place, which is half a kilometre from the Sri Guruvayur temple has a Siva temple. It is believed that worship at Guruvayur will be complete only after worship of Mammiyur Siva also.

The deity of Guruvayur is endearingly called Guruvayurappan, the Lord (Appan) of Guruvayur.

Guru and Vayu brought Viswakarma, the architect of the god and built the temple. The image was installed in the solar month of Kumbha (Aquarius). The rites were formally begun on the day of Pushya, the eighth asterism, presided over by Brihaspati himself, and completed on the day of Anuradha, the seventeenth asterism, sacred to Mahavishnu as Mitra.*

Such is the *mahatmya* of the idol at Guruvayur as narrated by the Sage Dattatreya. The glory of the image is revealed in the following verses wherein it is mentioned that the Lord infused His own glory into the image to help His devotees in their devotion, to raise them from the miseries of the iron age, to cure the afflicted of their maladies and bless them with health and prosperity.**

*Atha vā nityasevārtham bhaktānam bhagavan
svayam*

svakiye vighrahedhatta tādrśim mahānīyatām

*Bhaktiā samsevitam nityam bhagavad-
divyavigraham*

Kalau nānyā gatihi punsām vinā yatpratimārchanam

Rogaturajanasesusokavidhvansanakksamam

*Gachacha tvamāpi rājendra punyaksetram
ramāpatehe*

(To help the devout in their daily worship the Lord imparted his own glory to the image. Mankind in this age

* *Glory of Guruvayur*, "K.V. Krishna Ayyar, Kalyana Kalpataru, August 1964.

** *Narayaniyam*, with English Commentary, by P.N. Menon.

of Kali has no solace other than doing daily puja to it. It destroys illness and sorrow. O King of Kings, you too proceed to this sacred temple of Vishnu (Guruvayurappan.)

After hearing the story of Guruvayur in full, Janamejaya, accompanied by the sage Dattatreya, went thither and observed devotion for four months under his direction. Bathing only in the Rudratirtha (temple pond), drinking nothing but the water from the Rudrakupa (temple well) and eating only the meagre food obtained as the Lord's prasadam, he would be present at all the twelve* darshans beginning with the *nirmalyam* at 3 a.m. (at this time the Lord is still adorned with flowers and garlands of the previous day) and ending with the *tripuka* (the fumigation of the sanctum sanctorum with nine odoriferous gums) at night. Every day after his morning darshan he would also go to Mammiyur to bow before Siva.

At last, one night while asleep, Janamejaya felt the lotus hands of the Lord pass over his body from head to foot. When he opened his eyes he found to his joy and wonder that the racking pains had ceased and the festering sores healed. He returned to his kingdom with a mind full of devotion to the Lord of Guruvayur to whom no one prays in vain.

* The twelve darshans are: (1) *Nirmalya Darshan* (2) *Vakacharthu* (3) *Ushah Puja* (4) *Etirthu Puja* (5) *Morning Siveli* (6) *Pantirati Puja* (7) *Uchcha* (Noon) *Puja* (8) *Evening Siveli* (9) *Diparadhana* at dusk (10) *Athazha* (Night) *Puja* (11) *Night Siveli* and (12) *Tripuka*.

CHAPTER III

A PEEP INTO HISTORY*

How old is the present temple? While, according to legend, the deity is more than 5,000 years old, no historical records are available to establish the antiquity of the temple. The earliest reference to Guruvayur is to be found in a Tamil invocation in which the Lord is addressed as *Kuruvayurampuram-parperumale* (O, Lord of the celestials, residing at Guruvayur). An early 16th-century poet, in his Malayalam work *Chakravakasandesa*, refers to a place called Kuruvayur beyond Mammiyur. Even as late as A.D. 1637, that is some fifty years after the *Narayaniyam* was composed, the deity is referred to in the temple records maintained in the *Koleluttu* script as *Kuruveyur Tevar*, *Kuruveyur* being a variant of *Kuruvayur* used in the Tamil invocation and the Malayalam *Sandesa*. In early Dravida, *Kuruvai* meant the sea. Hence Kuruvayur might mean the village situated on the sea which must have since receded.

It was the author of the *Narayaniyam* who was responsible for associating Guru and Vayu with this village near the sea, thus giving the temple a sanctity all its own. Moreover, at this time the popularity of Sanskrit was growing under the aegis of the Zamorin and the fashion was to Sanskritize Dravidian place names. Thus,

*Based on 'Guruvayur' by Prof K.V. Krishna Ayyar, published in the *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. XL, Part III, December 1962.

in the *Narayaniyam*, Bhattatiri often addresses the Lord of Kuruvayur as Gurupavanapuresa.

It is strange that neither Nammalvar nor Tirumangaiyalar has sung about Guruvayur, though they have praised Tirunavayi, the ancient Vishnu shrine on the banks of the Bharatapuzha. The temple records of Guruvayur that escaped the iconoclastic fury of Tipu Sultan indicate that Guruvayur comprised the five desams or villages of Guruvayur, Tiruvenkatam, Mammiyur, Tamarayur and Anjiyur. In course of time the other four desams merged with Guruvayur.

Further, the war between the Zamorin and the Velatri or the Raja of Valluvanad for Tirunavayi also tended to promote the importance of Guruvayur. The temple at Tirunavayi was great and more ancient. Its 30-day annual festival of *Mamakam* or *Mamankam* drew pilgrims from all parts of Kerala as the waters of the Bharatapuzha on which it stands became sanctified by the mystic flow of the Ganga. The war for Tirunavayi however lasted long and the devotees on the other side of the river began to prefer Guruvayur. In due course the Zamorin himself became a devotee of Guruvayur and his subjects naturally followed him visiting the temple in large numbers.

The income of the temple derived from the offerings of devotees also swelled. This enabled the authorities to construct the eastern and western gopurams and encase the flag-staff in gold. The *Chakravakasandesha* refers to the towering gopuram piercing the skies and the flag fluttering in the air at the top of the golden flagstaff.

Even with the increasing influx of pilgrims the temple authorities found it difficult to arrange for the

various offerings in rice as Guruvayur lay in a deficit area. The Zamorin in the course of his conquests had extended his sway through the centre of the fertile Palakkad district as far as Pollachi. He arranged for the procurement of rice from the Perumanur devaswom in the present Parakkulam village near Kunisseri – and the Cherikkal of Vallappanad some time in the fifteenth century. The temple accounts show that every year some 300 to 500 *potis* of paddy were taken to Guruvayur from here at the astoundingly low transportation cost of one Fanam or 28 Paise per *poti* as head load over a distance of about 70 km.

The central shrine which we see today is said to have been rebuilt in A.D. 1638. In the following year *Visvabali* was performed to propitiate all the spirits, good and bad, for the welfare of the whole world - *Sarva-lokahitaya*. This is an elaborate rite, lasting five days and requiring 3,636 measures of rice, 1,245 coconuts, 4,302 bananas, 325 pounds of jaggery, 100 measures of puffed rice, 100 measures of bran and 50 measures of ghee. Compared to this, the *utsavabali* conducted during the annual temple festival is a much simpler rite performed in the course of a single day with just 32 measures of rice. The *Visvabali* appears to have been performed more than once as the records state – “as formerly performed and found in the older *olas*, palmleaves” in which the records were kept.

By the end of the sixteenth century Guruvayur had become the most famous place of pilgrimage in Kerala. This was mostly due to the five foremost devotees of the Lord: Poontanam (A.D. 1547-1640), Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri (A.D. 1559-1625), Vilvamangalam II (A.D. 1575-1660), Kururamma (A.D. 1570-1640) and Prince

(afterwards Zamorin) Manavedan (A.D. 1595-1658). Their work of propagating the glory of Guruvayur has been described elsewhere. As Prof. Krishna Ayyar points out: "The greatness of a temple is due to the faith of its devotees. Just as bhaktas lived by the faith of the Lord, the Lord Himself shone through the devotion of the bhaktas."

Later History

With the beginning of the eighteenth century evil befell Kerala in general and Guruvayur in particular. In A.D. 1716, during the course of the war with the Zamorin, the Dutch raided Guruvayur. They plundered the underground cellar containing the treasures, stripped the flag-staff of its gold and set fire to the western gopuram. But the losses were recouped from collections to the Ekadasi festival and Utsavam. The western gopuram was also rebuilt in A.D. 1747 by Panikka Vittil Ittiraricha Menon.

Again in A.D. 1756 the Dutch in their resumed war with the Zamorin (1753-1758) desecrated the Trikunavayi temple to which Guruvayur was subordinate. Since the Brahmins who fled at the approach of the Dutch refused to come back and perform purificatory rites at the temple, the Trikunavayi Devaswom was dissolved, and the Zamorin became the supervising trustee of both Guruvayur and Trikunavayi in addition to being their Mel-Koyma or sovereign protector.

In A.D. 1766 Haidar Ali captured Kozhikode (Calicut) and his forces occupied Chavakkad and Guruvayur. He spared the temple for a ransom of 10,000 Fanams which was paid by Vatakkeppat Variyar. But following the

general insecurity, the flow of pilgrims almost ceased. It became impossible to bring rice from the distant Perumanur Devaswom. The tenants also began to withhold their annual payment. In this extreme condition Srinivasa Rao whom Haidar had appointed governor of Malabar persuaded his master to grant a *Devadaya* or free gift to the temple in 1780 and thus saved it from total extinction.

Again in A.D. 1789 Tipu Sultan who had succeeded Haidar came down to Malabar in his attempt to root out the resistance of the Zamorin and convert Hindus to Islam. Fearing the destruction of the image, the *Mulavighraha* was hidden underground. Mallisseri Nambudiri and the Kakkad Otikkan removed the *Utsava-Vighraha* to Ambalapuzha. Tipu set fire to the temple, plundered it and destroyed the smaller shrines. A timely rain as also an incorporeal voice averted a major catastrophe.

Tipu was driven out by the princes of the Zamorin's family with the help of the English. On March 28, 1792, he ceded Malabar to the victors. Thereafter the image was brought back from Ambalapuzha and the *Mulavighraha* hidden underground was reinstalled on September 17, 1792. But the daily worship and annual festivals suffered a great deal. Thanks to Tipu's *Jihad* many tenants became Muslims and would not pay any rent. The *Devadaya* confiscated by Tipu could be restored from his successors, the English. The Zamorin himself was helpless as his position remained uncertain till A.D. 1805.

Fortunately, the Ulanad Panikkars came to his rescue and they looked after the interests of the temple for

nearly seventy-five years, from 1825 to 1900. Like the earlier devotees Chempakasseri Nambudiri and Desavarma Nambudiri who gave away their all to the Lord, the Panikkars offered their services to the temple free and made large contributions from their family estates. This enabled the proper conduct of the daily puja and the annual festival. In A.D. 1841 the Government of Madras restored the *Devadaya* appropriated by Tipu Sultan.

In due course the temple grew prosperous. A series of building activities were launched. In 1842 the eastern gopuram was rebuilt as evidenced by the inscription on one of its walls which reads:

Bhūpālairvavajādyai kalimalarārchitan punyalokān

*Arodhum nisprayāsam nijasukrtajitān divyasopān
mārgam*

*Tungam hennaitarāpyam gurupavanapuresāgratam
gopurāgre*

*Vyājenārdhāmjnājārdhaya kritamatir karam
chailavāragni dhīśah.*

In A.D. 1859 the central shrine and the *mandapam* in front were covered with copper. A permanent flag-staff with bell-metal covering was also set up in the same year. In A.D. 1892 the *Chuttambalam*, or the colonnaded hall all round the central shrine, the *Vilakkumatam* or the gallery of lights, the *Kuttambalam* or the dancing hall and the *Sastha* shrine were renovated and roofed with copper sheetings. The eastern courtyard was covered with a tiled roof.

At the turn of the present century the temple saw several administrative reforms under Shri Konthi Menon who became manager in A.D. 1900. He was as devout as the Panikkars. It was he who divided the work of the Devaswom into different departments for greater efficiency. He fixed the hours of worship and strove to keep the temple premise clean. He reconstructed the *Pattayapura* or granary and set up the big bell to the south of the eastern gopuram to chime the hours of the day.

In A.D. 1916 a Court of Wards assumed the management of the Zamorin's Estate which included Guruvayur. Mr. (afterwards Sir) J.A. Throne, I.C.S., completed the work of Konthi Menon. With the rendition of the estate in 1928, the Zamorin once more became responsible for the administration of Guruvayur. His rights were more clearly defined in a scheme for the temple framed by the High Court of Madras.

Guruvayur hit the headlines in 1931-32 when a Satyagraha was launched to secure the entry of untouchables into the temple — Harijans otherwise could enter the temple only once a year for the Ekadasi festival in November-December. It was led by the late Kelappan, a prominent Congress leader of Kerala, better known as the "Kerala Gandhi". The Satyagraha started on November 1, 1931 and lasted till January 28, 1932. During this period Sri Kelappan undertook a fast unto death in front of the Eastern Gopuram for 12 days. He broke the fast at the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi. During the Satyagraha the temple remained closed for a month without puja. The Satyagraha did not produce any immediate result.

The temple entry movement had started as early as in March 1924 at the famous Siva temple at Vaikom in the erstwhile Travancore State. In this Gandhiji himself had participated alongwith several other leaders. The Guruvayur stir brought out once again the urgency of the reform and aroused the conscience of the Hindu society.

The result was the Travancore Temple Entry proclamation of 1936, followed by similar measures in British Malabar (which was part of the then Madras State) in 1946 and in Cochin in 1947-48. Since then every Hindu can have darshan of Bhagavan outside the Garbagriha. Indeed with the opening of the temple to Harijans, which is a landmark event in the history of Guruvayur, the place became a major pilgrim centre in India. The flow of pilgrims began to steadily increase and with that the income. For instance, the work of gilding the flag-staff with gold which was completed on January 30, 1952, brought in donations worth Rs 31,168 while the total expenditure came to only Rs 21,457.

However there still continued the custom of offering *Namaskara sadya* (feast), exclusively to Brahmins in the *uttupura* (dining hall). One day, Swami Anandatirtha wanted to partake of the feast, but he was disallowed since it was an exclusive offering for Brahmins. This incident sparked off a controversy and an agitation for the abolition of the age old custom, which raged for nearly two years.

Finally, the temple authorities reviewed the whole matter and decided to scrap the custom, throwing open the *Namaskara sadya* to every one irrespective of caste. From January 1, 1982, the Devaswom itself has made

arrangements for feeding as prasadam (*Prasada Oottu*) at the dining hall for 500 to 1000 pilgrims daily at 11 a.m. Devotees can also make offering of any amount (minimum Re. 1/-) for free feeding.

Guruvayur was in the limelight again when, on November 30, 1970, a disastrous fire broke out in the temple. It was Sunday, November 29, 1970, the sixth day of the annual Ekadasi festival. After the night *vilakku* (procession), the devotees had dispersed and the temple doors had been closed. Around 1.15 a.m. some persons in the neighbourhood noticed smoke coming out from the Western *Chuttambalam*. They raised an alarm. People in their thousands irrespective of age, caste, creed – Hindus, Muslims and Christians rushed to the temple. Chanting 'Narayana' 'Narayana' they fought the furious fire shoulder to shoulder.

Despite five hours of all-round raging fire, the *Srikoil*, the *vigraha* of Guruvayurappan and the sub-shrines of Ganapati, Ayyappa and Devi, as also the flag-staff remained unaffected. This is indeed the greatest miracle of Guruvayurappan in modern times. "*Nainam dahati pavakah*". Fire does not destroy the self, says the Gita. The Guruvayur temple too is indestructible. Even if its structure of wood and stone can be damaged, it is rebuilt to the glory of the Lord.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TEMPLE

It may be recalled that Guruvayur was subordinate* to Trikunavayi Temple Devaswom till the dissolution of the latter in A.D. 1757. Yet it was a temple state, the Lord being its head though He functioned through the *Yogam*, or the assembly, *Uralar* or the Governing Committee and the *Manusham* or the Chief Executive. Everything was done in the name of the Lord of Guruvayur. At the close of the worship every night, the holy palm-leaf containing the accounts of the day was read before Him.

The *Yogam* or assembly consisting of the heads of the Nambudiri families - originally seventy-two in number - met once a year. It appointed the governing committee which, in turn, appointed the Chief Executive.

Then there was the *Pattar*, who was something like a Chief Secretary and keeper of records and correspondence. The family of one such *Pattar* namely, Kantiyur Pattar, still survives, but only for ceremonial purposes.

There was another official to maintain law and order and to protect the temple from outside attacks. He was *Pura-Koyma*, *Pura* meaning outside and *Koyma*, ruler. This office was hereditary and Vannari Nampiti was the

* "*Guruvayur*" by K.V. Krishna Ayyar in the *Journal of Indian History*, Volume XL, Part III, December 1962.

incumbent. He escorted the Lord when He went in procession for His *Aarattu* or ceremonial immersion.

Annual review of the Administration:

At the end of every year there was something like a review of the administration. Since the Lord Himself administered the state it was natural that His government should be ideal and that none of His subjects should have any grievance. To ensure that no one had any complaints it was customary for the *Pattar* to call out three times: "Has anyone any grievance?" This was done before the flag was hoisted for the annual festival and before it was hauled down at the close. If anyone came forward with a complaint it had to be heard and disposed of before proceeding further.

The memory of this custom is still preserved during the *Aarattu* procession when it stops at the north-east corner of the tank where stands an *Attani* or porter's rest. All the noise and playing of drums stops for a while. In the silence that is maintained a member of the Kantiyur family comes forward and says, "We have no grievance." Then the procession resumes.

The story goes that one of the *Pattars* of the Kantiyur family, the hereditary Chief Secretary of the Lord since A.D. 1757, was murdered at the spot marked by the *Attani* when the *Aarattu* procession was going on. The festival was naturally suspended. By this time the British had already established their supremacy. Hence the Lord could not punish the guilty then and there through the *Pura-Koyma* or *Mel-Koyma* or over-all ruler. The murderer was handed over to the Police. The Kantiyur family

expressed satisfaction at this and the suspended festival was resumed and gone through.

The seventy-two Nambudiri families who originally constituted the *Yogam* or assembly became nearly extinct in course of time. In the seventeenth century there were only seven and they constituted both the *Yogam* and the *Uralar*. Now Mallisseri Nambudiri is the only survivor. After the dissolution of the *Trikunavayi*, the Zamorin became the supervising trustee with Mallisseri as a co-trustee.

For over half a century, i.e. from 1825 to 1892, the temple was managed under a scheme framed by the Court by which an agent was appointed jointly by the trustees. He was directly responsible for the management of the *Devaswom*.

From about 1889, however, disputes arose between the two trustees, each trying for the upperhand. They led to many unpleasant incidents — the temple even remained closed for over a week. In 1893, a compromise was arrived at between the two and once again it was smooth going for the affairs of the temple. However, matters came to a head and in 1916, the Court of Wards assumed the management of the *Devaswom* along with the trustees.

After the compromise of 1893, many improvements were effected in the temple. Some repairs were carried out in the existing structures, while a few new buildings were added. The roofs of the *Srikoil*, *Vatilmatams*, *Chuttambalam* and *Kuttambalam* were also plated with copper.

Again in 1927, the Zamorin got back the management from the Court of Wards and the temple came under his direct control.

From 1930, the Devaswom came to be managed under a scheme framed by the Madras High Court. The scheme was slightly modified three years later. By this the powers of the trustees were clearly defined and their sphere of action strictly restricted. Rules were laid down for the upkeep of the temple and for its efficient management. Salaries for the manager and supervision charges for the two trustees were also fixed. A Superintendent was appointed for the general management of the temple.

Under the provisions of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act, the H.R.E. Board had supervising authority over the affairs of the temple. In 1939, when the Congress was in power, the Board, not satisfied with the running of the temple by the trustees, gave notice that it would assume supreme control. But the Zamorin moved the High Court and the Board's notification order was nullified. The High Court passed strictures on the H.R.E. Board for notifying a temple governed by a scheme framed by a Civil Court and defying thereby the status of the Court. Thereafter, the Board again made attempts to bring the Devaswom under its control, but without any success. The administration of the temple thus continued under the joint trusteeship of the Zamorin and the Mallisseri Nambudiri as under the 1930-scheme.

But over the years the affairs of the shrine had been steadily deteriorating as is indeed the case with many other temples in Kerala whether managed privately or by

the Devaswom Board. This is as much due to the carelessness of the temple authorities as to the indifference of devotees. With a view, therefore, to improving the affairs of the Guruvayur temple, which is fast becoming a pilgrim centre of all-India fame, and for the benefit of its ever-increasing number of devotees, the 1930 - scheme was replaced by the Guruvayur Devaswom Act, 1971, enacted by the Kerala Government. The Act came into force on March 9, 1971.

Managing Committee

Under the provisions of this Act, the administration of the temple is entrusted to a committee known as the Guruvayur Devaswom Managing Committee. The day-to-day administration of the Devaswom is carried out by an Administrator appointed by the Government.

The Managing Committee will, of course, include the present trustees, namely, the Zamorin as the President and the Mallisseri Nambudiri as the Vice-President. The Chairman of the Guruvayur Township, the Administrator, the temple Tantri, representative of the employees, and members of the Government constitute the Committee.

The duties of this Committee have been clearly defined under the Act, which cover all aspects of the temple's administration. The conduct of the daily pujas and of the festivals as laid down by the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act (XIX of 1951), provision of proper facilities for worship by the devotees, the custody of the temple cash, vessels and jewellery, administration of the Devaswom properties, maintenance of cleanliness in the temple and its environs, administra-

tion of charities instituted by the public, payment to employees, etc., are responsibilities of the committee.

For the post of Administrator an officer not below the rank of Deputy Collector or Deputy Commissioner is appointed by the Government. He acts as the secretary of the Managing Committee and the Chief Executive of the Devaswom.

For the appointment of the Devaswom employees, the Act provides for the constitution of the Board with the Commissioner as President and the administrator, two members of the Temple Management Committee and a nominee of the District collector of Thrisoor as member.

It will be seen that, by the Guruvayur Devaswom Act 1971, the temple administration which had vested in the two traditional trustees now extended to 14 members who constituted the Managing Committee.

The Act was however struck down by the High Court of Kerala after which a fresh ordinance was promulgated on November 29, 1977. This was followed by a regular bill passed by the Kerala Assembly on March 2, 1978.

According to this bill, the Managing Committee is to consist of nine members — the Zamorin and Mallisseri Nambudiri, the Tantri of the temple (ex-officio), a representative of the employees of the Devaswom and not more than five persons of whom one shall be a member of a scheduled caste, having interest in the temple. The latter two categories are to be nominated by the Hindu Ministers of Kerala Government.

This Committee acts through an administrator selected by it. But the panel of names is furnished by the Government. They should be officers not below the rank of Deputy Collector. Government also appoints a Commissioner not below the rank of a Government Secretary to oversee the activities of the Managing Committee.

The bill specifies that committee members should take an oath before joining office that they preach Hindu religion, believe in temple worship and do not believe in the practice of untouchability.

In striking down the Guruvayur Devaswom Act, the High Court had observed that there should be no government interference in the administration of the temple. Yet there is hardly any difference between the new committee and the old one except in the number of nominated members who continue to be appointed by the Government as also the administrator and the commissioner. Small wonder there is widespread criticism from all quarters.

Social Welfare Schemes.

A notable feature of the temple administration at Guruvayur is that a part of the funds is spent on public welfare schemes like education, medical aid etc. Hundreds of students in and around Guruvayur used to go to far off places for their college education. Realising their hardship, the devaswom authorities set up a first-grade college, Sri Krishna College, in 1964 in beautiful surroundings 4 km. to the east of Guruvayur, at a cost of Rs. 35 lakhs. There is also a high school, and a nursery school maintained by the devaswom.

Kshetrakala Nilayam.

The Devaswom also runs a Kshetrakala Nilayam where young aspirants of Krishnanattam are trained. There is also provision to teach the temple art form, known as *Kalamezhuttu* - portrayal of godly figures in coloured powders. Besides, there is another institution, Vadyakala Vidyalayam, to train students in Panchavadyam, Chenda, Kombu, Kuzhal etc.

Institute of mural painting

At Punnathur Kotta, the elephant sanctuary, where the temple elephants are maintained, the devaswom has established an institute for conducting a five-year Diploma course in mural painting, admitting ten students every year.

Medical Centre

Located half a furlong to the south of the temple, this medical centre provides free medical treatment. It has 75 beds now with facilities such as ECG, X-Ray etc. Plans are afoot to expand the medical centre.

A museum housed in Sathram bungalow exhibits rare offerings made by the devotees to the Lord. The museum is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on all days except Tuesdays. Admission is free.

Library & Reading Room

A well-stocked library of books on religion, philosophy, art and culture is also run by the Devaswom. There are hundreds of rare palm-leaf manuscripts in the

reference section. Located in the east block of the Sathram, the library is open from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on all days except Sundays.

Publications

The Devaswom publishes books on Hindu philosophy and brings out a monthly journal in Malayalam, called *Bhaktapriya*. It also runs two book stalls - one in the Vyjayanthi buildings near Eastern gopuram and the other situated in *Uttupura* near the booking counters.

Vrindavanam Estate

The Devaswom has a 100-acre estate called Vrindavanam estate at Vengad in Malappuram district, about 55 km from Guruvayur. Palm trees and other vegetations are grown here for feeding the elephants. Also crops such as coconuts, cashew etc. are cultivated here. The cows offered to the Lord by devotees are maintained here on a 25 acre plot, called Gokulam.

CHAPTER V

THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE AND OTHER DEITIES

The eye-filling figure of Lord Guruvayurappan in the sanctum sanctorum is, as stated earlier, the full manifestation of Lord Mahavishnu as was revealed to Devaki and Vasudeva at the time of Krishnavatara.

The God-head is contemplated in two different ways: as manifested (Personal, Saguna, with attributes); and as unmanifested (impersonal, Nirguna, without attributes). While the unmanifested is incomprehensible to the unlightened, the manifested is within easy grasp of the ordinary aspirant. Has not the Lord Himself said on Bhakti Yoga in the Gita thus?

*Kleśohdḥikatarasteṣām
Avyaktāsaktachetasām
Avyaktā hi galirduḥkham
Dehavadbhiravāpyate*

(Greater is their difficulty whose minds are set on the unmanifested, for the goal of the unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach)

As the embodied thinks of himself with form, he cannot help thinking of his God as anything without a form. The worship of the Saguna Brahman, the Supreme Being with attributes, is the easier path. On the other hand, he

who adores the Nirguna Brahman, the Absolute Reality without attributes, has to be free from bodyfeeling from the beginning. The attainment of that state is not possible for all. Only the *jnani* or the realised soul can rise to the level of worshipping the Impersonal Brahman. The easy and natural course for the ordinary aspirant is, therefore, to offer worship to the Supreme Being that has a form.

Indeed the Lord manifested Himself in Sattwic forms through His various incarnations. While people in the virtuous eras of the dim past could see His embodied forms in flesh and blood, to later generations, the sanctified idols of these incarnations provide the only glimpse of the Lord. The deity at Guruvayur is one such manifested form - of Sri Krishna at His birth. As Narayana Bhattatiri has sung in his *Narayaniyam*:

*Avyaktam te svarūpam duradhigamatamam tattv
śuddhaikasatvam
Vyaktamcāpyetadeva sphutamamrtarasāmbhodhikal-
latulyam*

Dasaka 99, Sloka 10.

(Thy indistinct or unmanifested form is extremely incomprehensible. But that distinct form that is here manifest (in the idol at Guruvayur) is of the nature of Sattwa, pure, and is like the wave of the ocean of ambrosia)

Having seen the efficacy of meditating on god with a form as a means of ultimate realisation, it would be interesting to acquaint ourselves, though briefly, with some of the principles laid down in making images and with

the special characteristics of Vishnu idols in particular. According to the *Silpa Sastra** an image must elevate the devotee to the higher plane of action and meditation. Great attention should be paid to its eyes, eyebrows and forehead. The lips should be slightly parted in a smile and the neck graceful like a conch shell. The arms should be like the trunk of an elephant and the thighs like the stem of a plantain tree. A beautiful belly and shapely feet are other excellences of the idol.

Of Vishu images in particular, it is said that they are generally shown in one of the three postures: *Sthanaka* (standing), *Asana* (sitting) and *Sayana* (reclining). They have usually four arms carrying the *Sankha* (conch), the *Chakra* (discus), the *Gada* (mace) and the bow and arrows. Of ornaments, they are shown to carry several, such as the *Padma* or the lotus, the *Kirita* or the crown, the *Makara-kundalas* or the crocodile earrings, the *Keyura* or armlets, the *Kankanas* or wristlets, the *Udarabandhas* or girdles, the sacred thread etc. Then there is the *Srivatsa*** mark on the right chest, the

* *Sri Venkateswara, The Lord of the Seven Hills, Tirupati*, by P. Sitapati, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, pp 9-12.

** Once the sages living close by the river Saraswati decided to ascertain who among the three deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, possessed the sattvic nature to the greatest degree. They entrusted this work to the sage Bhrigu. To test the three gods, he first proceeded to Satyaloka and acted in a manner that offended the God Brahma there. The latter was enraged but soon calmed himself knowing that Bhrigu was a devotee in whom there was a strength of years of austerities. Then he went to Siva and showed disrespect to him. Siva became so angry that he was about to kill him but was held up by Parvati. Lastly, he proceeded to Vaikuntha and found the Lord sleeping on the lap of Lakshmi unaware of the arrival of the sage. Bhrigu struck Him with his foot on His chest. At this, the Lord got up and begged of him forgiveness. He also wished to have that foot-print on His chest as an ornament for all time. It is this foot-print that is known as the mark of *Srivatsa*. This episode shows that the Lord is ever loving towards His devotees in whichever manner they treat him.

Vaijayantimala (a garland reaching up to the knees) and the *Kaustubha* or gem sacred to Lakshmi, adorning the chest.

The *Tantrasamucchaya*, which is the standard text book for the Vishnu temples of Kerala describes Mahavishnu as follows:

Shining with brilliance of a thousand suns, invincible,
With Conch and Discus, Lotus and Mace in the long and
sturdy hands;
With a robe of light yellow silk round the loins, with the
glowing crown on head,
And the brilliant fishlike pendants in the ears adding to
each other's lustre,
With Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Earth leaning on
Thee for support on either side,
And with Thy ever smiling face O Lord? I meditate upon
Thee!

We may now attempt a description of the body of the Lord at Guruvayur. Made out of a particular kind of stone called 'Patala Anjanam', the deity is in the standing pose. Evocative descriptions of the Lord occur in the *Narayaniyam* and one cannot do better than to resort to these, though even the great poet admits that His form is indescribable. A general description of the God Personal which its author had come to worship at Guruvayur, is quoted below:

*Sūryasparadhikiriṭamūrdhvatilakaprodhāsipñālānt
aram
Kārūnyakulanetramārdrahasitollāsam Sunāsāputam
Gandodyanmakarābhakundā layugam kanthojjvalat-*

kaustubham.

Tvadrupam vanamālyahārapatalśrivatsadīpram bhaje

Dasaka 2, Sloka 1.

(I worship Thy form - that form with Thy crown (on the head) revealing the Sun, the middle of Thy forehead refulgent with that sandal mark drawn up. The eyes melting with compassion, Thy face beaming with that sweet smile, Thy nostrils beautiful. Thy cheeks shining with the pair of ear ornaments of the shape of Makara (fish), Thy neck radiant with the *Kaustubha* ornament, and Thy body (chest) charming with the wood-garland, clusters of pearl necklaces and the mark *Srivatsa**)

*Keyūrāṅgada kaṅkaṇottamamahāratnāṅgulīyāṅkita-
Sṛīmadbāhucattushkasangatagadaśaṅkhāripankoruhām
Kāncit kāñcanakāncilānchitalasatpitāmbarāḷambinī-
Mālambe vimalāmbuja dyutipadām murti tavārtick-
hidam.***

Dasaka 2, Sloka 2.

* The translations of the Slokas quoted in this Chapter are taken from *Narayaniyam* with English Commentary by P.N. Menon.

** It will be worthwhile to understand the significance of the different symbols which the Lord carries in His hands. The *Chakra* or discus symbolises the cycle of time (*Kala-chakra*) whose whirligig brings in consolations as well as revenges, according to the *Varaha Purana*. It is also described as the *Dharma-chakra*, maintaining order and law in the universe.

The *Sankha* or Conch is the destroyer of *avidya* (lack of enlightenment) represented by darkness and silence. When Mahavishnu touched Dhruva on his cheek with His conch, He removed Dhruva's *avidya*. *Sankha* is also said to represent the *Nada-brahma* (the apotheosis of sound as the Brahman).

The club in the lower hand (mace) is for setting right the irregularities of the world, i.e. *duṣṭa-nigraha* (destruction of the wicked) and *śiṣṭa-paripalana* (protection of the righteous).

The lotus is said to represent Mother Earth eternally at work at her wheel of creation. It also denotes the beauty and freshness of the cosmos.

(I cling to that indescribable form of Thine - that form that destroys all distress, with those lustrous four arms bedecked with shoulder ornaments, arm bracelets, bangles and rings studded with the best of precious gems, and holding therein the mace, the conch, the disc and the lotus, that form wearing the yellow silk garment, and shining with the gold waist-girdle, and with feet of the lustre of a charming lotus)

The detailed description of the enthralling vision of Sri Krishna as was finally revealed to Narayana Bhattatiri shows how wonderfully the image of Guruvayur conforms to the ideal prescribed in the sastras. "Before me," says the poet in the last Dasaka of *Narayaniyam*, Agrepasyami: "I see a bluish radiance, excelling the charm of even the beautiful cluster of *Kalaya* flowers... In the core of that dazzling brilliance I see the form of a Divine Lad, charming with the grace of budding youth... I see His dark hair and luxuriant locks, beautifully coiffured and decked with jewels and garlands of *Mandara* flowers, adding to their lustre by a ring of peacock feathers all round... I see the broad full-moonlike forehead, with the sandal paste mark adding to its beauty... I see His charming eyes, with their brows and lashes, and pupils shedding mercy all round... I see His beautiful face with its prominent nose, emerald cheeks, ears with their fishlike pendants and the benign smile of reddish lips with the rows of shining teeth in between... I hear the entrancing notes of the flute, held to the lotuslike lips with His bejewelled hands... I see His charming neck with the *Kaustubha* jewel, and the chest with the *Srivasta* mark and necklaces of pearls and gems... I see His slender abdomen, though containing the whole Universe, with the yellow silk all round held by the waist band shining with glittering jewels. I see His thighs, looking

all the more beautiful on account of the yellow silk covering them His knees like caskets showering gifts on the votaries waiting at His feet and the tapering calf muscles, leading downwards to the ankles and the lotuslike feet... I see His arching feet like the tortoise back with auspicious toes and moonlike nails... O Lord! May Thy Feet rest on my heart for ever, destroy my sufferings and bestow Supreme Bliss on me."

This is the picture conjured up in the Holy of Holies at Guruvayur. While the various *lakshanas* and characteristics referred to in this chapter are those prescribed for *silpins* while making images for worship by human beings what of the image which was worshipped by the Lord Himself? It is indeed perfection personified, a *divya-mangala swaroopa*. The glory and the greatness of the Lord are beyond description. Let us join the poet in his prayer in the concluding words of his immortal work: "May the Lord forgive us our rash venture to describe His glory and bless us with "*ayur arogyasaukhyam*-long life health and happiness.

Other Deities:

It will be seen that the deity of Lord Krishna at Guruvayur stands all by itself in the Central shrine, unaccompanied by any of His consorts as is the case with some other Vaishnava temples. Other images in the temple are Ganapati, Sasta or Ayyappa and Bhagavati. The Ganapati shrine is situated within the *Nalambalam* itself at the south-west corner. The Sasta shrine is outside the *Nalambalam* on the south-east corner.

The goddess is called Edatharikathu Kavil Bhagavati. Her image was installed originally in the very

place where the present *Srikoil* of Guruvayurappan stands. The Goddess, the story goes, was awaiting the arrival of the Lord's image from Dwaraka. As she saw Guru and Vayu bringing the image, she welcomed them and requested them to install the Lord in her place, she herself moving a little to the left. Before leaving her original abode she requested the Lord that He give her darshan once a year. Accordingly every year on the *Aarattu** day of the Utsavam, the Lord visits her shrine and the mid day puja is conducted here. Only on this occasion is cooked naivedyam offered at this shrine, the offering on all the other days being *azhal*. Since the Goddess moved to the left, Her shrine is called Edatharikathu Kavu, which in Malayalam means the shrine located on the left side.

Other Temples in Guruvayur:

Besides the main temple there are a few other shrines in and around Guruvayur which are of interest to pilgrims since these are either connected with the main deity or have been its *kizhetams* or subordinate shrines. It is significant that out of the offerings made during the *udayastamana puja* (dawn to dusk worship) for Guruvayurappan, a measure of rice is still sent to temples like Mammiyur, Narayanamkulangara, Perunthatta, Tiruvenkatam, etc. Let us take a brief look at some of these temples:

Mammiyur:

Mention is made in the previous chapter of Siva and Parvati who after indicating to Guru and Vayu the place where to install the deity departed for Mammiyur. This

* *Aarattu* is a bathing festival - See Chapter IX

is the origin of Siva shrine at Mammiyur which is considered even more ancient than the Guruvayur temple. There are also images of Vishnu, Ganapati and Subrahmanya here.

The place is about half a kilometre north-west of Guruvayur. It is believed that one should pray here also after worshipping Guruvayurappan, in order to derive in full measure the blessings of Bhagawan.

A Sanskrit sloka in praise of the Mammiyur Siva says that the deity grants all the desires of the devotee:-

*Ambāpure kṛtavāsam
Sakham sadyah prasādinam
Sampūjya sādhayet sarvam
Sakalamīshṭa dīyataḥ.*

The Ambapuram referred to in the verse is the Sanskrit name of "Ammayur" by which name Mammiyur used to be known. Mahasivaratri is the most suspicious day here. During Navaratri, Saraswati Puja is also conducted.

Narayanamkulangara temple:

This is also a subordinate shrine of Guruvayur and is half a kilometre to the north of Mammiyur. The *prathishṭha* here is the Goddess Narayani. She is otherwise Vishnumaya and famed as bestowing salvation on men.

The annual temple festival here is conducted on the 10th of the Malayalam month of Makaram (January end).

Parthasarathi temple:

Situated a few metres to the north of the Manjula on the east *nada*, this temple had been in ruins. The remnants of what appeared to be a great temple and the beautiful idol of Parthasarathi (Sri Krishna as Arjuna's chariotleer) were discovered in July 1972 when the roofing of a structure collapsed. A *deva prasnam* (astrological investigation) conducted on 1st January 1973 revealed that the image had been consecrated by Adi Sankaracharya more than a thousand years ago. The story of how Sri Sankara came to Guruvayur in the company of Sri Narada during the Ekadasi festival and stayed on to codify the puja procedure in the temple is described in the Chapter on "Daily worship."

It is believed that the place had been blessed by divine presence much earlier. The sage Narada approached Lord Krishna to reveal to him the Viswarupa Darshan which he had granted to Arjuna when he imparted the Gita. The sage's prayer was not immediately granted.

The Lord directed him to go to Guruvayur and perform tapas. Sri Narada did so at the place where the Parthasarathi temple stands. Here Sri Krishna revealed himself as Parthasarathi and blessed him.

Years later at the behest of Sri Narada, Sri Sankara brought the idol of Prathasarathi from the Ganges and installed it here to perpetuate the divinity of the place. The temple flourished as a centre of worship for several

years. Sri Sankara had entrusted the worship and maintenance of the temple to Neduvil Matham Swamiyar. The matham is still in existence near the temple. But a few generations ago the Swamiyar was ousted by some evil-minded men and he established himself near Vadakumnathan temple at Thrissur along with other disciples of Sri Sankara. This was the cause of the decline of the Parthasarathi temple.

Happily, the temple has been revived and rebuilt. The re-installation of the Parthasarathy idol and the consecration of the idol of Adi Sankara and the Navagrahas in the renovated Parthasarathi temple were solemnised in the presence of His Holiness Sri Jayendra Saraswati of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam on June 13, 1981.

The celebration of the Gita day on Vrischika Ekadasi, (Sukla Paksha) is the important festival here. This also synchronises with the great Ekadasi festival of the Guruvayur temple.

Tiruvengkatam temple:

Half a kilometre to the north-east of the Parthasarathi shrine is another Vishnu shrine - Tiruvengkatam or Venkatachalapati of Tirupati. The general belief is that this is a Devi temple because only the image of Bhagavati on the south-east corner of the *chuttambalam* is what is worshipped now. The main deity Venkatachalapati - opposite this and facing east was the target of depredation by Tipu Sultan, it being disfigured below the neck.

A *deva prasnam* conducted in July 1975 revealed that the image had been consecrated by a saint from Tirupati more than one thousand years ago. He had come to Guruvayur hearing the glory of the Parthasarathi shrine installed by Adi Sankara and had prayed for the installation of Tirupati Venkatesa too in the vicinity. This materialised and the temple prospered for many years.

Some five hundred years ago, a devotee and a servant of this temple, owing to old age, could not proceed to his native village six kilometres away and offer worship to the family goddess. He had darshan of the Devi here and from then on this deity too flourished.

But in due course, like the nearby Parthasarathi temple, this shrine also fell on evil days. The saint from Tirupati was also forced to leave, like the Naduvil Matham Swamiyar. Thanks to Tipu Sultan's wrath and iconoclasm perpetrated by fanatics the temple existed only in name. Fortunately this is also now restored to its past glory.

Perunthatta Siva temple:

This temple, with its many stone inscriptions, and situated on the south side of Guruvayur temple about a kilometre away, has a historical significance. It is said that Tipu and his army during their invasion of Kerala camped here for some time. He was mentally upset for some reason and offered coconut water for the *abhisheka* of the deity. This done he felt relieved and gave up thoughts of plundering the temple. Instead, he even made a free gift of the rental due from the temple and arranged for the coconut water *abhishekam* which still continues.

To ward off fear of snake bite, dangerous snakes in the neighbourhood are caught in a mud pot and left here with an offering to the deity.

Tamarayur Vishnu Temple:

This little shrine, known as Tamarayur Srikanthapuram, lies one kilometre north of Guruvayur. It has a beautiful four-armed idol adorned with *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada* and *padma*. There is only one *Srikoil*, and mandapa opposite. It is a subordinate shrine of Guruvayur.

CHAPTER VI

THE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

Tradition has it that after the installation of the deity, Guru and Vayu brought Viswakarma, the architect of the gods, and built the temple. The construction is unique in more than one respect and might indeed baffle modern architects. A striking feature is that the deity can be seen from quite a distance from the eastern *nada* (gateway) though it is seemingly hidden by the huge *Dipasthambha*, *Dwajasthambha* (flag-staff) and *Belikkalu* (Altar). The first rays of the morning sun can be seen falling on the lotus-feet of the Lord on the vernal equinox, as though the Sun-God himself is prostrating before the deity. It is also said that in order to carry out future repairs and additions Viswakarma had his measuring rod (which is slightly longer than the conventional one used by the carpenter) engraved in relief on the surface of the northern basement of the *Ardhamandapa* (porch in front of the central shrine).*

There is another legend which attributes the construction of the temple, probably at a later period, to a Pandya king. This monarch was told on a reading of his horoscope by his astrologer that he was destined to die from a cobra bite. He therefore made up his mind to try whether he could avert his fate. He went on a pilgrimage thinking that if he could not change his destiny he would

* *Glory of Guruvayur*, K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *Kalyana Kalpataru*, August 1964.

at least spend his last days in sacred shrines. He thus came to Guruvayur and stayed there praying to the deity with great devotion. He was so engrossed in his worship that he did not realise the passage of time. One day he found to his amazement that the time predicted for his end has gone unnoticed. He returned to his kingdom and asked his court astrologer to explain to him how he out-lived his allotted span. The astrologer maintained that he had not gone wrong in his prediction, that the king had in fact been bitten by a cobra as could be seen from the scar left behind on his heel. But by the grace of the deity, before whom he had been meditating, he was saved from death. Looking back, the king recollected that while propitiating the Lord he had been engrossed in a plan to build a new temple to Him. Overwhelmed by the Lord's grace, he returned to Guruvayur with men and material and had the temple reconstructed.

During the centuries, the temple has been rebuilt, at least part by part, a number of times as described earlier. Nevertheless, the features of the sacred and domestic architecture in Kerala have been preserved through the ages.

It will be of interest to know the evolution of temple architecture in the south with special reference to the Kerala temples before we take up the description of the Guruvayur shrine proper.

Evolution of Temple Architecture in the South:

It is well known that South India is dotted with thousands of temples, many of them noted for their antiquity and artistic excellence. This is due to the historic

fact that, unlike North India. the country south of the Vindhya had been relatively free from repeated foreign invasions and was therefore able to preserve its religious monuments from wanton destruction or neglect. Further, the life of an average south Indian is dominated by religion. To him a temple is a symbol of 'dharma' and to provide for its construction and maintenance is considered to be an act of merit herein and hereafter.

What is more, as a visible emblem of the religion, philosophy and life of the people, the temple in the South has played a role far more vital than any other institution. The presiding deity has symbolised the Supreme Principle which controls the affairs of the world and gives direction to the spiritual urges of the people. The temple itself has become the centre of all civic and social life. Or rather, the village or town grew around the temple which became the hub of all activities.*

The influence of the temple extended even beyond the religious and spiritual realms; it became an important factor in the economy of the village. There are temples (like Guruvayur) which became leading landowners, thanks to the munificence of kings, nobles and devotees. While the construction of a shrine, which usually took many years, gave employment to hundreds of artisans, the daily rituals provided for priests, musicians, florists and a host of attendants on a permanent basis.

The temple premises also became the venue for public entertainment. Music and dance recitals held during the festivals have provided entertainment to rich and poor

* *Temples of South India*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

alike. During these festivities people participated in large numbers in the general merriment without any social distinctions. Trade too flourished during such occasions. In short, the temple became the centre of people's lives. The evolution of sacred architecture, therefore, from its simple unostentatious beginnings as a shrine of worship to an agglomeration of structures, some functional and some ornamental, conformed to the increasing emotional and spiritual demands of the devotees.

The temples of South India may be broadly classified into the Chalukyan and Dravidian styles though many of the temples have characteristics distinctively indigenous to the region.

The stone-built shrines at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal in the Bijapur district of Karnataka State built about A.D. 500 are perhaps the earliest of the Chalukyan school whose evolutionary process continued right up to the middle of the 13th century.

The 6th, 7th and 8th centuries witnessed the upsurge of the rock-cut technique in Western Deccan under the Rashtrakuta rulers. We owe to this the great treasures of Ellora.

The later Chalukyan style (A.D. 1000-1300) owed its patronage to the Hoysala dynasty. The finest of the Hoysala temples are the Chennakesava temple at Belur, the Hoysalasvara at Halebid (in the Hassan district of Karnataka) and the Kesava temple at Somanathapur, 40 Km. from Mysore city. These temples are more elaborate and ornate, though basically they are a continuation of

the early Chalukyan tradition as represented by the group of temples at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal.

Coming to the Dravidian school, five great ruling dynasties, namely the Pallavas (A.D. 600-900), the Cholas (901-1150), the Pandavas (1100-1350), the Vijayanagar (1340-1565) and the Nayakas of Madura (1600-1700) were intimately associated with the evolution of this style which had a long, unbroken process of development.

The Pallavas who laid the foundation of the Dravidian style produced two forms of temple architecture — the rock-cut and the structural. The monuments at Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) near Madras are exquisite examples of the rock-cut shrines while the shore temple there and the temples of Kailasanatha and Vaikunthaperumal at Kanchipuram represent the earliest structural form.

The Cholas who succeeded the Pallavas in A.D. 897 further improved the excellent architectural tradition of their predecessors. We owe to them two magnificent temples - the Brihadesvara temple at Tanjavur with its imposing gopuram and a greater shrine at Gangaikondacholapuram.

Then came the Pandyas who held sway over Tamil Nadu for nearly two centuries until the great kingdom of Vijayanagar was founded in A.D. 1336. The Pandyas contributed little to the building of new temples, but they extended their skill on the architecture of the main gateways and the superstructure of existing temples. The eastern gopuram of the Chidambaram temple, the one on the second enclosure wall of the Jambakeswara temple

at Srirangam and that of the great Kumbakonam temple are examples of the Pandya gopuram.

Temples belonging to the Vijayanagar type are to be found all over South India where the Dravidian type predominates. The most exquisite examples of this group are found in Hampi, the deserted capital of Vijayanagar itself, near the site of Tungabhadra Dam about five miles off Hospet.

With the eclipse of the Vijayanagar empire in 1565 the contribution of Madurai, one of the states into which the empire splintered, was by far the most significant in the advancement of the Dravidian style. Under the Nayaks of Madura, who extended their rule as far as Kanyakumari, came to be built several temples having imposing gateways and towers. The most outstanding are those at Madura, Srirangam, Tiruvarur, Rameswaram, Chidambaram, Tirunelveli, Tiruvannamalai and Sriviliputtur.

Unique Kerala temples

From the stately, elaborate temple complex of the Dravidian style and the ornate, exquisite temples of the Chalukyan we come to an altogether different style of temples in Kerala. The gabled or multiple-roofed structures of Kerala temples, built of laterite stone, bricks, woods and tiles present a completely different appearance from the other Southern styles. Simple and neat in conception they almost resemble the thatched houses and huts of Malabar. The southernmost part of Kerala, especially Thiruvananthapuram, is however an exception. Because of the proximity of Tamil Nadu both the Dravidian and indigenous styles co-exist here.

Comparing the temples of Kerala with those belonging to the Dravidian style, Dr. Stella Kramrisch points out: "The temples and other structures with the gable roofs lack both the costliness and grandeur of the Dravidian structures, but they are neat and simple, with provision of admitting plenty of light and fresh air; and in these respects are undoubtedly superior to the costly edifices of the Dravidian style. This indigenous style is peculiar to Kerala and indeed the like of it is not known to exist anywhere else in India. The chief characteristic of this style is that wood enters largely into its construction."

A unique feature of the temple architecture of Kerala is the roof which is by far the most striking part of the construction. It is broad-based, steep and pointed superstructure, resembling the thatched roof of huts and houses commonly built in Malabar. Great attention is paid to the construction of these roofs, the length, thickness and the joints of the rafters being regulated by rules laid down by ancient treatises on architecture (*Vastu Vidya*).

These roofs can be single or double, but they take the shape of the plan of the structure on which they are superimposed. If the plan is circular, the roof becomes an enormous cone, its open base covering a good part of the perpendicular wall in a broad, sweeping curve. The square temple has its steep pyramidal roof, being in appearance more austere and less impressive than the cone. The third variety is a ridged roof, single or double. The ridge of the roof runs breadthwise and projects beyond the hipped end, terminating in a characteristic triangular gable-end resembling an open attic. The roofs, whether conical, pyramidal or ridged, are often multiple, two or

three storeys high and add greatly to the height and majesty of the structures.

It is interesting to note that the ridged roof is not altogether peculiar to Kerala. We find that in the architecture of certain Himalayan regions, more especially in Nepal and Kashmir, gabled or multiple type roofs have prevailed throughout the centuries whether the material was wood or stone. The Kerala type is nearer to that of Nepal although we cannot explain this affinity between the two types in terms of cultural contact between regions which are separated by nearly fifteen hundred miles.

Shri K.V Soundara Rajan in his book, *Indian Temple Styles* says that the severity of rain in Kerala and snow in the Himalayan regions must have been contributory factors in the growth of a typical style in these parts. Thus the wide availability of timber and tile as also the climate explains how the wooden styles in these regions have assumed the gable or the pagoda type. According to him, they have also something in common with Nepal, Burma and China and might have been a borrowal from earlier Buddhistic conventions for a shrine.

Shri Soundara Rajan adds: "There seems to be many links between China and Kerala also attested to by history and probably the intensity of climate gave rise to a community of analogous styles, the raw materials being similar. But it should be noted at the same time that, but for the superficially common roof-type, all other elements of their architecture are indigenous. In Kerala, especially, it can be convincingly demonstrated at successive stages that the careful camouflage of the typical concepts and

features of South Indian architecture, if stripped, displays many common structural and architectural idioms of the main land across the ghats.... If an analogy could be culled out from the culture of the region itself, in much the same manner as there is a dichotomy between the almost sparsely clothed character of the Kathakali costume, in temple architecture also, they kept the *naligriha* or the womb-temple plain in the interior but completely smothered it with a timber and copper-sheet exterior venture."*

Features of Kerala Temples:

We now proceed to a more detailed description of temple architecture in Kerala with special reference to Guruvayur.

The component parts of a temple** from the foundation upwards are:(i) the *upapitha* (pedestal),(ii) the *adhisthana*(base), (iii) the *stamba*(pilaster), (iv) the *prastara*(entablature), (v) the *griva*(neck of the dome), (vi) the *sikhara*(cupola) and (vii) the *stupa* (pinnacle).

Up to the *prastara*, the structure is the same as that of the Dravidian style. The difference that strikes the eye is,as described earlier, in the upper portion. In the Kerala temples, the wooden roof is covered with copper sheets or tiles, and ornamented with perpendicular or tilted triangular gables. It is the heavy and often incessant rainfall that necessitated these deviations from the Dravidian style in the construction of the roofs, though care has

* *Indian Temple Styles: The Personality of Hindu Architecture* by K.V. Soundara Rajan, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi pp 77-46.

***"Architecture in Kerala"* R.V. Poduval. *The arts and Crafts of Kerala*, PAICO Publishing House, Cochin.

been taken to avoid complete eradication or transmutation of the designs prescribed by the sastras.

Most of the temples in Kerala face east though some are turned west, and a few south. The general features of the temple are the central shrine, called the *Srikoil* which may be square, oblong or circular in shape. It may consist of one or two storeys over which a sloping roof is built. Within it is the *Garbhagriha*, the cell in which the image of the deity is installed. There is a *Namaskara mandapa* in front of the central shrine, square in shape and with a pyramidal roof - this is used by the devotees to prostrate themselves before the Lord. Surrounding this is a corridor or pillared hall known as the *Nalambalam* or *Chuttambalam*, the outer portico of which is the *Belikkal-pura* containing the *Belikkal* or altar, with a flag-staff or *Dwajasthamba* in front of it. Around the *Nalambalam* is the *Vilakkumatam*, a gallery of five to nine rows of lamps fixed over a masonry base or wooden framework.

On the outside of whole structure there is a paved processional path. *Kuttambalam* for staging of *Kuttu*, and other performances is another structure outside, akin to the *Natakasala* (Drama Hall) of Dravidian shrines.

The temple well which supplies water for bathing the image and for preparing offerings of food to the deity is situated generally in the north-east corner. The kitchen called *madappalli* is in one portion of the *Nalambalam*.

Smaller shrines dedicated to Sasta, Parvati, Ganesa or other deities are also found in almost all the temples. A banyan tree with images of Nagas (serpents) around it is another feature. All these are enclosed by a rectangular wall with an entrance often surmounted by *gopurams*

(towers) in the centre of each side. There is also the temple tank as part of the structure which devotees can use and directly enter the temple after a bath.

The Guruvayur Temple:

The temple at Guruvayur is comparatively small in dimensions, though it has two imposing gopurams - one on the east and the other on the west. (See plan at the beginning of the book.) The temple faces east and is usually entered by the eastern gopuram. Here one is struck by the *dipastambha* (Pillar of lights) which, when lit at night adorns the entrance with a radiant splendour. Installed by the late Shri Chettur Sankaran Nair in 1910 (Ist Chingam 1085 M.E.), it is 24 feet in height from the base and has thirteen circular receptacles to hold the wicks.

The gopuram is two-storyeyed. The porch and pillars are elaborately carved and the walls are covered with paintings.

Next to Gopuram is the lofty *Dwajastambha* (flagstaff)* It is 110 feet high and is gilded with gold.

Passing the flag-staff one enters the inner precincts through the *Belikalpura* and to a passage lying between the two *Vatilmatams* (raised platforms) in the *Nalam-balam*.

There are ten beautifully carved pillars here - five on each portion. Of these the one to the east of the southern

*Flag-hoisting in temples heralds the annual utsavam or festival. The festival lasts 8 to 10 days at the end of which the flag is lowered. On both occasions there are special rites performed by the chief priest. See Chapter on Festivals.

Vatilmatam is held particularly sacred. It is believed that Bhattatiri often used to sit here, leaning on this pillar while doing his Bhajan and composing the *Narayaniyam*. For this reason this and its opposite number on the northern *vatilmatam* were retained while all the other eight pillars were substituted during the temple renovation following the 1970-fire.

Passing the *Vatilmatams* one reaches the *Namaskara Mandapam* or the *Ardhamandapam* referred to earlier.

As stated earlier, on the northern side of this structure the temple yardstick used for the construction of the temple is marked. This procedure of marking the measurement at a prominent place is followed in Kerala temple construction. In Tamil Nadu the measurement is taken from the foundation stone which has to be dug out for renovation purposes.

Beyond this is the *Srikoil* or *garbhagriha* (Sanctum Sanctorum). The *Srikoil* is square in shape and has two storeys. There are three rooms inside, the innermost being the *Garbhagriha* where the deity is installed. The walls of the *Srikoil* have paintings depicting episodes from the life of Sri Krishna.

The *Vatilmatam* covers the entire eastern side. On the southern side there is the temple kitchen (*Madapalli*) where *naivedyams* for the deity are prepared. To the western side of the kitchen is a dark cell closed on all sides. Nobody knows what it contains; hence it is called the "Mystery Cell". It is believed that the chamber contains precious jewels and ornaments deposited there when the deity was removed to Ambalapuzha at the time

of Tipu Sultan's invasion referred to earlier. The entrance is closed by stone slabs and the treasure inside is supposed to be guarded by serpents - Panchanagas. No one has ever dared to enter the cell, one or two attempts made in the past having proved futile.

The *prasnam* conducted during June 1976 attaches great sanctity to the spot and calls for regular worship. It is believed that there is a secret passage from the cell to the *Garbhagriha* and thence to the temple tank.

Next to the "Mystery Cell" is Saraswati *ara* (*ara*, meaning room). It is here that Saraswati puja and worship of the books is conducted during the Navaratri festival.

Beyond this, on the south-west corner, is a small shrine dedicated to Vighneswara or Vinayaka. While in Tamil Nadu there are many independent temples for Vinayaka or Pillayar, as he is better known there, in Kerala there are hardly any such. But there is a niche for Ganapati in every temple though there may be exception like the Kutalmanikyam temple (dedicated to Bharata) at Irinjalakuda.

Next comes the beautiful sculpture of Anantashayanam (the Lord reclining on the serpent) on the west side of the *Nalambalam*. This is in place of the old painting of the same picture destroyed by the 1970-fire. The story goes that there was a gateway here. Once one Moosad whose duty it was to carry the *Utsava Vighraha* on the elephant for *Siveli* did not show up in time. When questioned he did not give a convincing excuse — his attitude was one of the nonchalance. He was therefore

driven out through this passage and the doors were shut. Eventually this passage was closed and the space covered by an exquisite painting of Anantasayanam. Curiously, Moosad also was never seen again. And his duties were taken over by the *Kizhusanti* (assistant priest) ever since.

Between the temple of Ganesa and the Anatasayanam sits the *Melsanti* (Head Priest) during specific periods to distribute the prasadam personally — sandal paste and flowers — to those who offer archanas.

The passage on the northern side is used by pilgrims for entrance and exit like the main entrance on the east. This doorway has a special significance in Vaishnava temples, where it is referred to as the *Swargavasal* (passage to Heaven). In Srirangam, for instance, this doorway is kept open only once in the year, that is 10 days prior to and 10 days after the Vaikuntha Ekadasi festival. On these days the deity is taken out to the Thousand-Pillared *mandapam* through this gate. But at Guruvayur which is Bhooloka Vaikuntha this is kept always open.

To the eastern side of this passage is a room called "Nrittam" which literally means dancing. It is so called because it is believed that Vilvamangalam Swamiyar, a great devotee of the Lord, used this room for meditation and often danced there in ecstatic devotion. It is believed that the Lord often gave him darshan in person after the last ritual for the day — *Tripuka*.*

In front of "Nrittam" and to the north-eastern side of the *Srikoil* is the temple well. Its water is crystal clear

*For fuller description see chapter on Daily worship.

at all seasons and is reputed to possess digestive and curative properties. Indeed many pilgrims forgo their tea or coffee while at Guruvayur to enjoy the rare taste of this water. It is believed that the well is consecrated by the *Pratishtha* of Varuna.

Coming out of the inner portion of the temple, let us now circumambulate along the courtyard or *Matilakam* as it is called, starting again from the *Dwajasthambha* through the paved processional path around the temple. On either side of the *Dwajasthambha* are the stately *Dipasthambhas*. Of these, the one on the north has a history behind it.* It is erected by Kalpalli Karunakara Menon who had been in service with the East India Company for 33 years. In recognition of his loyal service he was sanctioned a pension (Rs 350) equal to his pay on his retirement. Subsequently he was sent as an envoy to Coorg where the king held him captive. When Coorg was annexed to the British territory he was freed. A devotee of Guruvayur, he had prayed to the Lord for freedom and vowed to erect a *Dipasthambha* in the temple. This he did on his release from prison.

The entire area between the eastern gopuram and the western side of *Nalambalam* is covered with tiled roof called *Aanapandal* (literally pandal for elephants) or *nadapura*. This is a magnificent shed sheltering pilgrims waiting for worship and is decorated with pictures and paintings. It is here that the *annaprasnam* and *tulabharam* are held. To the south of the gopuram there is a big bell to chime the hours.

To the south-eastern corner of the temple is the *Kuttambalam* for the performance of *Kuttu* referred to ear-

*Sree Guruvayur Temple Renovation Souvenir 1974.

lier. Discourses on the Bhagavatapurana, Gita etc are also held here. This hall also is decorated with sculptures and pictures.

To the north-western side of the *Kuttambalam* is the little shrine dedicated to Sasta, said to be the son of Hari and Hara, popularly known as Ayyappa. The image is small and made of stone. The main *vazhivadhu* here is the breaking of coconuts.

The courtyard is encircled on the southern, western and northern sides by buildings used for different purposes. On the southern and western sides these are used mainly as *pattayapura* or granary. The upper storey of the building in the north-west corner is the quarters of the *Melsanti* who is not expected to leave the premises of the temple during his six-month term of service since he has to observe strict celibacy during the period. The section south of the western gopuram is used as a storehouse while the temple kitchen is to the north. This is used during big feasts. The northern side of the building is called '*Agrasala*' or dining hall. This place is also utilised for daily Narayanajapam, Bhagavata discourses, etc. A portion of this is also used as the green-room for Krishnanattam, the stage for which is in the portico in front of the northern gateway of the *Nalambalam*.

The passage through the northern wall of the temple leads to the tank as also to the Devi shrine on the north-eastern corner.

The sanctity of the temple tank which is called Rudratirtha is worth noting. It is here that the processional deity or the *Utsavavighraha* is bathed on the last

day of the annual *Utsavam*. In ancient times the tank extended as far as Mammiyur and was also famous for its lotuses. Narayana Bhattatiri refers to it in his work as the 'the charming lake' while describing the episode of Prachetas, which is briefly alluded here.

King Pracheenabarhis* had ten sons known by the common name of Prachetas. The king, keen on the desire of creation, advised his sons "to marry and multiply". Accordingly they left the country and came to the Rudratirtha. They saw emerging from the waters Siva who, pleased with their salutations, taught them the hymn called the *Rudragita* in praise of Mahavishnu by virtue of which he said they would attain their object.

As enjoined by Siva, they meditated on Vishnu, standing in the waters of the lake for ten thousand years. At last Mahavishnu appeared before them and granted them the boon that they would have a noble and illustrious son who would fill the three worlds with his progeny. They married Marisa who gave birth to Daksha and he filled the earth with his children.

The recitation of *Rudragita* is considered to be very efficacious and even today devotees who want children repeat the hymn standing in the water as Prachetas did and also go to Mammiyur to pray to Siva.

In conclusion, here is an interesting account of Guruvayur temple with special reference to its architecture, extracted from the *Malabar Gazetteer* by Innes and revised by Evans.

*Pracheenabarhis or Barhishadan, was so called, as he during his sacrifice covered the entire earth with the darbha grass spread eastwards.

"The most popular of all the Kerala temples at present is the Krishna shrine at Guruvayur which has sprung into importance from about the sixteenth century. This temple is square in shape and is enclosed on the east and south by a lofty laterite wall; on the west by tiled buildings, where pilgrims are lodged and fed; and on the north by a bathing tank built of laterite steps. The *Srikoil* or central shrine, square in shape and having two *Prasadas* or storeys, the *Nalambalam* around it and *Kuttambalam* in the outer courtyard where *Puranas* are recited, are all roofed with copper. A conspicuous feature of this temple is the lofty bell-metal *Dwajastambha* (flag-staff) 110 ft. in height, plated with gold. A wide street leaps up through rows of shops to the eastern and main gateway of the temple which is surmounted by a two-storeyed *Gopura*. The porch and its pillars are elaborately carved with heads of elephants and bulls and other sculptures in bold relief; and its walls are covered with gaudy frescoes depicting the adventures of Arjuna, the Pandava. A Sanskrit inscription on one of the walls of the temple recites that the temple within is heaven and the gateway and the ladder thereto were built by the Lord of the Seas and Hills and had been trodden by the feet of many kings. The writing is in comparatively modern Malayalam characters: and by the Lord of the Seas and Hills, the zamorin probably is meant. The *Dipastambha* in front of the gateway has two inscriptions recording the fact that it was erected by a native of Travancore in 1011 M.E. (1836 A.D): and fragments of another inscription are seen on a broken slab of granite now used as a door-step in the house of Mallisseri Nambudiri. Adjoining the temple in the north is the *Aratukulam*, where the idol is bathed in the month of Kumbham (February). A writing on the granite door-post

of the western entrance which is also covered with a Gopura relates that the gate was erected by Panikkaveetil Ittitaricha Menon, Karyasthan, in 922 (1747 A.D). Pilgrims, especially those subjected to rheumatism resort to Guruvayur temple in large numbers and make offerings. Grouped around the temple are the houses of Ooralars or trustees viz., Zamorin and Mallisseri Nambudiri and those of the Eralappad Raja, Punnathoor Nambidi and many of the higher castes. The great Ekadasi festival is held annually about the second week of December; and it is very largely attended to by pilgrims from all parts of Malabar."

Renovation

The devastating fire on the night of November 29, 1970, which destroyed parts of the temple in the rear and on the sides necessitated the reconstruction and renovation of this immortal temple. The reconstruction of the destroyed portions of the temple in accordance with the ancient sastras thus became a challenge to modern architects.

A Temple Renovation Committee was constituted for this purpose with the Minister-in-charge of Religious Endowments as the President and the late Shri Kelappan as the working President. Shri K.K. Menon, who had worked for many years as executive officer of famous temples like Madurai, Tiruchendur, Srirangam, Palani etc. was appointed as the Special Officer and Secretary of the Committee.

An expert committee was also constituted with the following members:

Shri E. Madhavan Nair, Superintending Engineer, Buildings, Trivandrum.

Shri K. Rajagopalan, Chief Engineer, FACT Engineering and Design Organisation, Udyogamandal.

Shri Chennas Parameswaran Nambudiripad, Tantri of Guruvayur temple.

Shri Kannippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad and Shri Easwara Varrier of Tripunnithura, experts in Thachusastras.*

In renovating the temple the following points were taken into consideration:

(1) To provide for the maximum convenience of the devotees whose number has been increasing day by day.

(ii) To preserve the traditional style of Kerala temple architecture, and to avoid as far as possible inflammable material. Accordingly, the main proposals of renovation formulated by the expert committee were:

(1) Widening of the entrance doors at the east and west sides of the temple.

(2) To have a granite wall all along the *Chuttambalam* behind the *Vilakkumatam*.

(3) To bring down the raised platform of the *Chuttambalam* to the ground level to create more moving space around the *Srikoil*.

*Science of architecture.

(4) To have beautifully carved granite pillars in place of the wooden ones all along with *Chuttambalam*.

(5) To have a beautiful sculpture of Anantasayanam on the west side of the *Nalambalam* in place of the old painting which was destroyed by fire.

(6) To reconstruct the Ganapati shrine in granite with space all around for circumambulation.

(7) To renovate the temple kitchen and reduce the size of the platform in front of it for keeping *naivedyam* so as to make more moving space around the *namaskara mandapam*, and

(8) To recostruct the entire *Vilakkumatam* which was the source of the disastrous fire.

These proposals were further subjected to *prasnam* to ascertain the assent of the Lord as per the custom in Kerala. Except the first proposal i.e. widening of entrance door at the east and west sides, all other proposals were found acceptable to the Lord and were accordingly carried out.

As prescribed by the astrologers, the work was started on 1st May 1971 between 4 and 5 a.m. The foundation stone was laid by his Holiness Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Pithadhipati Sri Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati Swamigal. In the 8th century Adi Sankaracharya was stopped in his celestial journey and made to get down at Guruvayur to establish the puja routine. 12 centuries later, this Sankaracharya too had to change his set tour programme to participate in a func-

tion that gave shape to the new plan for the reconstruction of the temple.

The granite works were executed by two experts - Sthapathis Shri P.S. Baliya who carved in all the fifty-eight pillars and Shri S.K. Acharya of Vivekananda memorial fame who constructed Ganapati Shrine and sculptured the Anantasayanam. The entire woodwork was undertaken by Elavalli Narayanan Achary. The finished works are standing monuments to the excellence of their craftsmanship.

A fact worth mentioning in this connection was the discovery of fine quarries nearby as though indicating the Lord's grace in the work of renovation. While it is said that the best stones available are at Ambasamudram in Tamil Nadu, those found near Guruvayur have been acknowledged by experts to excel them. The cost of the first stage renovation amounted to about Rs 26 lakhs.

Face-lift for murals

To lovers of art, a welcome feature of the renovation is the face-lift given by repainting the murals that were mutilated in the 1970 fire. The walls of the sanctum sanctorum and the *mukhamandapam* were adorned with exquisite murals and engraving dating back to the 17th century, depicting scenes from Hindu mythologies. Most of them were destroyed in the fire and remaining few lost their splendour by the ravages of time.

It is of interest to note that some of the murals are erotic, showing various copulative postures, which are scarcely found in other Krishna temples.*

* *Face-lift for murals in Guruvayur Temple* by P.V. Venugopal, *Indian Express* 27.7.1982.

Initially the murals in the *mukhamandapam* were repainted. This was followed by repainting of the murals on the walls of the sanctum sanctorum. The work was estimated to cost about Rs 2 lakhs.

Noted temple artist Mamiyoor Krishnankutty Nair, who has a fellowship from the Central Government and a team of his assistants, chief of them being Raman Namboothiri, were engaged in the painstaking job of repainting the murals on the basis of the sketches of the old ones.

Krishnankutty Nair who is among the few artists specialised in mural painting has done the repainting of the murals in Sree Padmanabha Swami temple, Thiruvananthapuram and the *Kuttambalam* of the Kerala Kalamandalam.

The *Vilakkumatam* with eleven rows and in all 7,000 lights were lit for the first time after the fire on April 14, 1973 (Vishu Day). The entire renovation programme was completed on October 31, 1974.

CHAPTER VII

DAILY WORSHIP

Guruvayur temple follows an elaborate system of rites, which according to tradition, is traced to Sri Adi Sankaracharya.

Once, when Sri Sankara was journeying in the sky with Narada, the latter told the philosopher - saint that he was descending to Guruvayur. It was Ekadasi, the auspicious day when Lord Krishna imparted the Gita to Arjuna — whoever had darshan of Lord Krishna at Guruvayur on this occasion would receive divine blessings in full measure. It is said that Sri Sankara did not care to follow the example of Narada even after being told about the glory of Guruvayurappan. Lord's name were meant for the ignorant, and not for a supreme *jnani* like him. So he continued his celestial voyage but hardly had he advanced a few yards when he had a fall and lay prostrate on the ground just to the northern side of the temple. He realised how he had erred in ignoring the deity of Guruvayur and cried out to the Lord to forgive him.

The merciful Lord appeared before Sri Sankara and said to him that He was pleased with his faith and devotion. He told him that worship in temples, repetition of the Lord's name, listening to religious discourses and participating in temple festivals were all different forms of

expressing one's devotion to God. He said that Sankara should realise that He had incarnated Himself at Guruvayur to save people from the ills of the terrible Kaliyuga. The Lord asked Sri Sankara to spread the divine glory of Guruvayur all over the world.

Bhagavan further enjoined on him to stay on at Guruvayur for 41 days in constant meditation. Thus would people learn of the greatness and glory of constant worship to Him. He also conveyed his desire that Sri Sankara should draw up plans for the daily puja at this shrine. On Ekadasi day, He said there should be a grand festival with dawn to dusk worship. Sri Sankara carried out the divine behest with utmost devotion. Even today the system of daily rites at the temple is practised in accordance with the directions given by Sri Sankara*. He entrusted the responsibility for conducting the annual Ekadasi festival to the royal family of Chiralayam.

Ordinarily, there are four main pujas in great temples - *Ushah* (early morning), *Pantirati* (9 a.m.), *Uchcha* (mid-day), and *Athazha* (night). But at Guruvayur there are five - Panchamahapuja - the additional one is the *Etirtha* puja following the *Ushah* puja. (The approximate puja timings are shown in Appendix)

The day begins at Guruvayur at 3 a.m. Long before this, devotees take bath and line up outside the eastern and western gopurams with Lord's names on their lips. P. Leela's lilting songs come through the mike, lifting the devotees to ecstatic heights. As the temple bell chimes three, the massive gopuram doors are flung open and pilgrims make a bee-line to the sanctum sanctorum.

*"Guruvayur Ekadasi", by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, *Bhavan's Journal*, Annual Number, August 10, 1969.

Simultaneously, inside the temple, to the melodious notes of the Nadaswaram and the blowing of the conch, the *Melsanti* (Head priest) standing on the *sopanam* (stepping stone to the *Srikoil*), rings the bell, prays with folded palms and opens the doors. Inside, he brightens up the oil wicks in the lamps, and lo and behold!, the coveted *nirmalya* darshan of the Lord still adorned with the flowers and garlands of the previous night. The bells jingle and drowning everything is the full throated cry of "Narayana", "Guruvayurappa" from the surging mass, reverberating with devotion.

It is believed that after the night puja when the doors are closed, Devas come and worship the deity. Hence it is considered specially auspicious to have darshan of the Lord who has just been worshipped by Devas themselves, says the noted Tantri Andaladi Divakaran Nambudiripad*. Small wonder, this darshan, also called Viswarupa darshan, is the most sought after by devotees and attracts maximum rush during the day.

The priest presently removes from the deity all the adornments of the previous day and performs *abhishekam* (rite of bathing the deity) with gingili oil. Anointing the deity with oil also serves the purpose of preventing any damage to the image from the heat that emanates from so many oil lamps that burn inside the central shrine. Then '*vaka*'** powder is sprinkled all over the idol (It is not rubbed as it would cause wear and tear).

* The puja routine detailed in this chapter is based on an article *Brahmaarpanam* by Andaladi Divakaran Nambudiripad, published in *Bhaktapriya*, January 1986.

** *Vaka* is the bark of a tree, which is powdered and used. In olden days in Kerala it was used in place of soap. It is highly antiseptic and has many medical properties.

This is the well-known *Vakacharthu* ritual. The powder is removed by pouring plenty of water over the image.

In continuation, *abhishekam* is performed with water sanctified in a *sankha* in which the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Godavari, the Saraswati, the Narmada, the Sindhu and the Kaveri are invoked with mantra and tantra. This holy water is known *Vaarunajalam*. This is common in all temples but at Guruvayur there is a speciality — a golden kumbha or pot is also filled with sankha water consecrated with *Brahmakalasa* mantra and poured over the deity. This is known as *Gangaabhishekam* and is usually done in other temples only on special occasions for enhancing the *chaitanya* (divine life) of the deity.

As mentioned earlier, the image at Guruvayur is carved out of rare stone called Patala Anjanam, known in English as "black bismuth", Magnetic iron stone or Sulphuret Antimony. Water and oil used in bathing the idol are believed to possess curative qualities. Particularly the gingili oil used in the *abhishekam* is considered efficacious in the treatment of rheumatism and is hence taken home by devotees and preserved.

After the bath, the *vigraha* is wiped with a thin cloth and adorned with garlands, ear ornaments, *kasturi tilaka* and a red loin cloth. Butter in hand and playing the flute, the Lord appears as Balagopala (child Krishna), reminiscent of His playful days at Gokul, stealing butter and performing several other *lilas*. Then follows the offering of *malar* (puffed rice) as also plantains and sugar. As the flow of devotees continues to have the enchanting sight of *Unni Krishna* (child Krishna), the first of the five pujas of the day is performed. This is the *Ushah* puja with

offerings of cooked rice and *nai payasam* (rice cooked in jaggery and ghee).

Around 6 o'clock, the second puja - *etirthapuja* - is conducted with offering of *vella naivedyam* (white cooked rice). This is literally early morning puja when the sun rises right in front of the Lord, so to say. When the *Srikoil* doors are closed for this worship, *Ganapati homa* is performed in the temple kitchen. At the same time *Ashtapadi* is sung to the accompaniment of *Edakka* inside the temple while *nadaswaram* is played outside. All these in fact constitute different forms of worship as songs in praise of God help devotees to concentrate on their prayers while the priest behind closed doors is not distracted by outside noise.

After the *Srikoil* opens and sufficient time is allowed for devotees to have the eye-filling darshan of the Lord, the deity is taken out for *Siveli* (procession), the first of the three conducted daily. *Siveli* is actually *Sribali* - offering to Lord's celestial attendants. The *utsava vigraha* is taken out for this purpose, which is mounted on an elephant and taken round the temple.

When the lamps are lit and drums are beaten for *Siveli*, the head priest first makes offerings to *belikallus* (altars) , sprinkling water and dropping flowers and cooked rice. This ritual is conducted in all temples before *Siveli*, the idea being worshipping the Lord's retinue also, alongwith the Lord. However, at Guruvayur, Varuna in the temple well is also worshipped. This is because the idol at Guruvayur, as described earlier, is none other than that worshipped by Vasudeva and it was brought here after propitiating Varuna and with his blessings. Thereafter the altars in the outer *prakara* also are wor-

shipped. The idea behind the priest performing these ceremonies and the *Siveli* itself is that the Lord Himself stands by while offerings are made to His attendants.*

The procession is taken round three times. In front, 12 lighted silver lamps are held in two rows by members, some of whom traditionally come from certain families whose privilege it is to render this service. There is also the beating of drums like the *maddalam*, cymbals, and playing of pipes and *kombu*. A thousand devotees sing in chorus.

*"Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare
Hare"*.

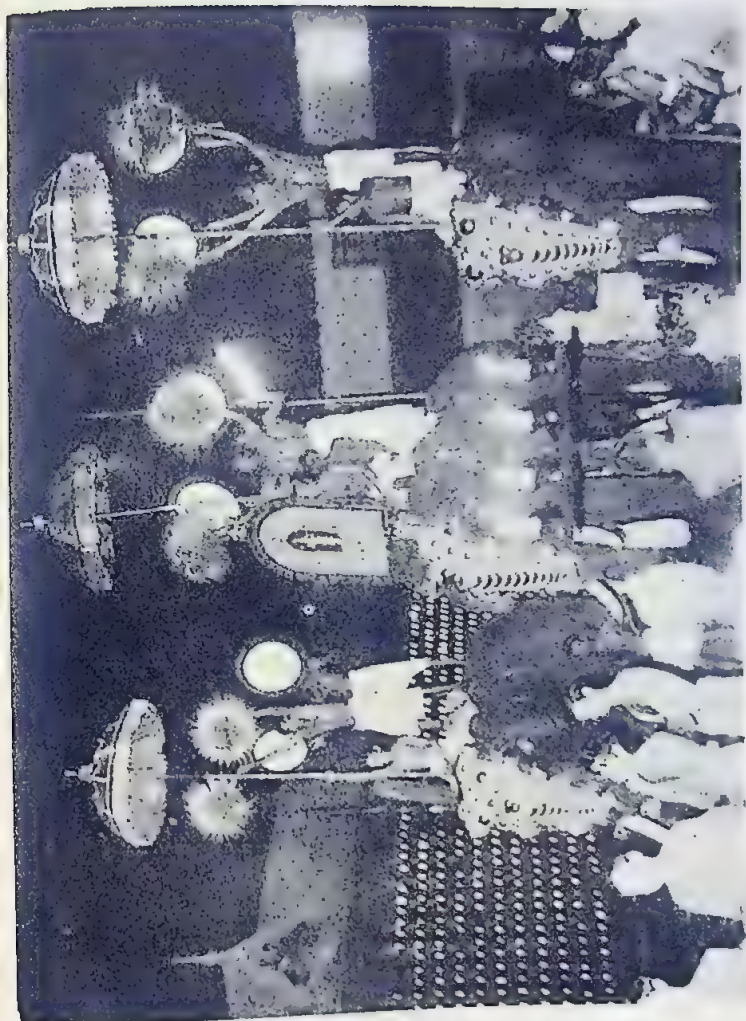
After the morning *Siveli*, there follows a series of *abhishekams* beginning with *kshiraabhishekam* (bathing in

* It is of interest to know the various subsidiary deities and members of Lord's entourage enshrined in the temple. Needless to add that it is sacrilegious to set foot on these belikkallus as devotees are apt to do in the rush since they represent different gods and demigods.

On either side of the sanctum sanctorum are Chandan Prachandan and Anandanandas. There is Indra below the *sopanam* while the *mandapam* in front of the *Srikoil*, is the abode of Garuda. Agni is on the south-east corner. On the south are Ganapati, Dakshinamurti, Yama, Virabhadra, Vigneswara, Ayyappa and the Saptamatas namely, Brahmani, Maheshwari, Skanda, Sakti, Vaishnavi, Vaaraahi, Indrani and Chamundi.

On the south-west corner there are Ganapati, Ananta, Nirthidevan, while on the west are Anantasayanam and Varuna. Vayu, Durga, Subrahmanya are on the north-west corner, Soma and Vaisravana corner. There is again Varuna in the temple well while on the Vatilmatams are Sri Pushti, Sankha and Chakra.

Similarly, in the outer *prakara*, the big *belikkallu* to the west of the *Dwajasthamba* represents Harisena and Dwajavahana. The small *belikkallus* around the big one and those at the four sides of the *Matilakam* are said to represent the entourage of the Lord like Kumuda. The one on the north-east is that of Kshetrapala. In front of the Sasta shrine is Bhadrakali while to the north of the *Dwajasthamba* are *belikkallus* for Guru and Vayu, the founder of the temple.



Lord's Procession at Night

milk) which is supposed to represent *Govindaabhisheka* which Indra performed in Vrindavan. Milk, tender coconuts and rose water are offered in plenty by the devotees for this purpose. After *Kshiraabhishekam* there is *Navakabhishekam* which is conducted with water filled in nine silver pots and sanctified with a course of pujas. This is followed by *Pantirati* puja (worship when the shadow measures 12 feet) and *naivedyam*.

The next ceremony is the *Uchcha* (mid-day) puja - the fourth and the most important for the day, conducted around 12 noon. This is also very elaborate because this includes worship of the entire retinue of the Lord and is, in fact, called the *valia* (big) puja. *Naivedyam* consists of cooked rice and *palpayasam* (rice boiled in milk and sugar). Feeding of a brahmin is a must during this ritual. When the doors are closed for this puja, *ashtapadi* is sung and *chenda* played. This puja also attracts huge crowds of devotees. The *Srikoil* is closed around 1 p.m. after this puja. There should normally be another procession of the deity after the noon worship. But at Guruvayur, this practice does not obtain and the second procession takes place after the temple is re-opened for evening worship at 4.30 p.m.

Thus around 5 p.m. the second procession is held. Then, as dusk falls, to the blowing of conch-shells, is performed the *diparadhana* (aarati). The deity, specially bedecked, has the serene radiance of the evening sun and the temple itself is bathed in the light of a myriad lamps. The inner *prakara* is filled with eager, fervent worshippers. It is as if all Guruvayur throbs with devotion. The ringing of bells, the beating of drums and the clash of cymbals, the sound of horns and the pipes and above all,

the full-throated cries of "Narayana" filling the air indeed create Vaikuntha on earth.

This is how Mahakavi Vallathol describes the splendour of Diparadhana at Guruvayur in his '*Bhakti* and *Vibhakti*'.

"In the glare of the lighted lamps all round

*Unaware of the passing of the day stands shining the
sacred shrine at Guruvayur,*

Fill to the full with the sound of Holy Names,

*Govinda, Hare, Krishna and the like, as in superb
Vaikuntha*

Thro' them can be heard now and then,

*In harmony with the Idakka drum the entrancing
song Ashtaspadi;*

*In the pathway in front of the Lord stand devotees of
diverse kinds,*

*With breath held back and palm joined to palm on
the chest pointing towards the Lord;*

Wet, with shapely hips, concealed by clouds

*Of dark tresses hanging behind but knotted at the
end,*

*Ravishing beauties, arrayed and decked in their
purest,*

Shine like heavenly damsels spreading their charms,

Hark! Look here! doors of the central shrine open, disclosing.

A grand new world! What is this? wonderful! auspicious! full of celestial splendour!"

The fifth and last puja — *Athazha* (night) puja - takes place around 7.30 p.m. *Appam* (sweetened rice cake fried in ghee) is the *naivedyam* offered during this puja. Then follows the *Siveli*, the third for the day. The day's rituals are concluded with "*Tripuka*" or fumigation of the central shrine and the temple with nine odoriferous gums in a silver tray. The temple is closed around 10 p.m.

For subsidiary deities like Ganapati, Ayyappa and Bhagawati daily two pujas are offered.

It will be of interest to know the organisational set up behind the rigid and orderly conduct of the daily rites.

(1) *Tantri*: The first in the hierarchy of priests is the *Tantri* who is well-versed in the *Tantras* or science and art of temple worship. His is a hereditary office, the *Tantrimatham* on the eastern bank of the temple tank being his permanent official residence. It was one of the ancestors of this family — Chennas Narayanan Nambudiri born in A.D. 1427 — who wrote the *Tantrasamuchchya*, according to which all temple worship is now conducted in Kerala.

Originally the *Tantri* was also the Chief Priest of the temple. Subsequently, he became the domestic chaplain of the Zamorin Raja. These duties, alongwith the other calls on him as the authoritative exponent of the *Tantras*, did not leave him free for his regular duties at the

temple; he now attends only on special occasions. He offers *Utsava Bali* or offerings to the celestial attendants during the annual utsavam. He also takes part in special worships during *Mandalam* (November-December) and other festival days.

(2) *Otikkans*: The word '*othuka*' means to recite and *Otikkan* is both teacher and reciter of the Vedas. Guruvayur has four *Otikkans*, the descendants of those who had formerly ministered to the needs of the original seventy-two families. They are known by their house names: *Pazhayam*, *Munnoolam*, *Pattakkuzhi* and *Kakkad*.

Their functions are akin to those of the *Tantri*. They often officiate for him in rites which he has to conduct normally. They also perform the third puja - *Pantirati* - daily. The additional priestly tasks of the *Udayasthamana* puja (explained in the chapter, "Offerings") are also their responsibility.

(3) *Santi - Kazhakam*: While the *Tantri* and the *Otikkans* are collectively called *Tantra-kur*, the daily officiating priests are called *Santi-Kazhakam* or priest-service. The *Santi-Kazhakam* comprises the *Melsanti* or the Head priest and the *Kizhusanti* or assistant priest. The *Tantri* and the *Otikkans* are hereditary, while the officiating priest hold office during the pleasure of the temple authorities the *Devaswom*.

The Head priest is selected by casting lots. The contenders are initially chosen by the *Tantri* on the basis of their knowledge and capability to undertake the arduous job. The one chosen is appointed only for six months as he has to observe strict celibacy and therefore has to live

within the temple walls, following a strict regimen. His work at the temple begins at 2 a.m and ends at 10 p.m. except for the break after *Uchaha* puja. Of the five daily pujas, he performs four, the *Pantirati* being performed by *Otikkans*.

The *Melsanti* is assisted by *Kizhusanti* in the daily worship. The duties of the latter are to prepare the offerings for the pujas, bring water for the *abhishekam*, make sandal-paste and undertake such other sundry services as required by the *Melsanti*. He has also to take the *Ut-sava Vighraha* on elephant-back during processions. He cannot touch the deity though he can enter the *srikovil* - only the *Tantri*, the *Otikkan* and *Melsanti* are privileged to do so.

Then there are a number of *Ambalavasis* (temple servants) drawn from certain privileged families of Varriers, Nambisans, Pisharotis etc., whose chores consist in collecting flowers, making garlands and holding the lamps during procession. *Pattukkarans*, literally meaning, "men for ten days", are another class of attendants. It is their duty to supply by turn every material required for the various pujas, *naivedyam* etc., for a ten-day period. This privilege is also hereditary.

Before concluding this chapter it will be of interest to recall an incident in 1956 when for the first time the Head priest was appointed by drawing lots. In those days the appointing authority of *Melsanti* was the Zamorin of Kozhikode. Being a prestigious and coveted post there were as usual several aspirants that year. Influence also played its part, with most applicants being backed by persons who mattered. The Zamorin naturally had a dif-

ficult task in making the choice as he did not want to displease anyone.

That year there was however a very poor Nambuduri who was well learned and qualified for the post, but he had no one to back him. He had seven daughters to be married. He placed all his hopes on Guruvayurappan, spending his time mostly in the temple and praying to the Lord.

At the same time the Zamorin was also in a predicament with so many applicants, all with good recommendations except the poor Nambudiri, to choose from. So he decided to switch the responsibility to the Lord by drawing lots. It was the name of the poor Nambudiri that was picked up in the draw and the Zamorin straightaway appointed him. Since then the system of appointment of *Melsanti* by lot continues.

CHAPTER VIII

OFFERINGS

Every day thousands of devotees visit the Guruvayur shrine. The favours they seek of the Lord are different – cure of bodily ills, mental peace, progeny, success in vocations and examinations and, above all, salvation. They express their devotion and gratitude to Lord Guruvayurappan in a hundred odd ways. Some do it with folded hands with tears in their eyes. The more affluent ones make offerings ranging from a silver coin to currency notes worth lakhs of rupees, from a calf to elephant.

India's golden girl P.T. Usha offered one of her gold medals to the Lord. The ace batsman Krishnamachari Srikant, an ardent devotee, once offered a silver basket weighing 3 kilos. On another occasion he gifted a 4-kilo silver plate to replace a very old one used for holding the holy conch blown at dawn every day.

Among the common articles placed at the altar of the Lord, says an *Indian Express* report, are gold and silver ornaments, utensils made of silver, copper and steel, as also fruits and vegetables. The hundi collections include cash, Indian and foreign currencies, cheques and drafts.

Among the rare offerings are motor bike, coconuts with horn-like outgrowth, a revolver when temple thefts were on the rise and hammer, sickle and star, made of

iron, representing the election symbol of the Marxist party.

The articles received as offerings are usually auctioned by the devaswom. Rare collections are however preserved and are on display at the devaswom museum near the temple. There are innumerable items here like fancy table lamps, images of Gods and Goddesses, portraits depicting scenes from epics and so on. They provide "an interesting sidelight into the depth of devotion as well as cultural traits of devotees spread over different parts of the country and abroad", as the *Indian Express* report puts it.

Not all however approach the Lord in supplication. Chiruthevi Amma was 70, when some years back, she willed her life-time earnings of some Rs 80,000 to the temple. She herself belonged to the world of the homeless. She had no family, her husband and children having died. After this domestic tragedy, she migrated from her native Thalikassari village to Guruvayur.

She worked as a maid-servant with families in and around Guruvayur but saved every paise she could, and carefully deposited it in a bank. She spent all her leisure hours in the temple and lived on the temple prasadam leaving her bank balance untouched, which she dedicated to the Lord.

This "poor woman with a rich heart" also fulfilled another of her wish by conducting *udayasthamana* puja, the costliest offering, which includes a feast and all the expenses for the dawn to dusk puja, as the name implies.

Udayasthamana puja

This offering costs around Rs 17,000. Even so this is most popular and as such there is a big rush as it is conducted only on alternate days. As of writing this (March 1992) the bookings extend to the year 2007 with a long queue behind waiting for their dates.

The rituals connected with *Udayasthamana puja* virtually begin the previous night itself with what is known as *Arialavu* or measuring of rice. This symbolic ceremony takes place immediately after the *diparadhana* at dusk, near the temple well in the presence of the *Tantri* or *Otikkan* and other temple officials as also the devotee offering the puja. That night's special feast *athazha sadya*, also forms part of the ritual.

The next day, the early morning puja from 3 a.m. when the *srikoil* is opened till the morning *siveli* there is no special puja. The *udayasthamana puja* proper comprising 15 special pujas begins after the morning procession. These, as also the usual milk *abhishekam*, *Navakam*, *Pantirati* and *Uchcha puja* are conducted by *Tantri* or *Otikkan*. There is special feast also for devotees.

In the evening, the temple as usual opens at 4.30 p.m. Then follows *Siveli*, *Diparadhana* and *athazhapuja* when special oblations are made to the altar in the south-east corner of *nalambalam*.

Thereafter special *vilakku* (illumination) and elephant procession is held. The procession takes five rounds instead of the normal three. At the end, there is a custom of offering of token money of Rs 8.25 at the

entrance to the temple after which only the Lord's *thidambu* will be dismounted from the elephant. This token offering is to express the gratitude of the devotee offering *udayasthamana* puja to all those who co-operated in the conduct of the *vilakku* and this is done in the presence of the Lord Himself.

The *tripuka* that follows marks the end of the elaborate *Udayasthamana* puja.

Elephants

Offering of elephants to Guruvayurappan, just as cows and calves are offered in some temples is another phenomenon in the temple. No other temple in Kerala or elsewhere in the country has as many elephants as Guruvayur which has about 40 elephants — all kept in Punnathur kotta and maintained by the devaswom.

The offering of elephant is called *Nadayiruthal* literally making it sit before the Lord. There are three prescribed ways of doing this: *Nadayiruthal* with *khalabham* or sandal paste; *Nadayiruthal* spreading *vella* (white cloth) or *karimpatam* (woollen blanket) and *Nadathallal*.

The *Nadayiruthal* function is held after the morning *siveli*. An area near the flag staff is earmarked for the purpose. It is cleaned, lamps lit and a cloth or blanket is spread over which the elephant is made to sit ceremonially. The *melsanti* offers it *tirtha* and prasad adorning it with sandal paste and giving it a name.

In *Nadathallal*, the elephant is simply brought to the temple and offered without any ceremony.

With so many elephants attached to the temple *anayoot* (feeding of elephant) has become a popular offering even among non-Hindus. On this day all the elephants are taken to the temple around 10 a.m. and are offered a sumptuous feast comprising fruits, molasses and boiled rice. It is a sight to see so many elephants being fed together and naturally a large number of devotees assemble at the temple to witness the event.

Tulabharam

This is another common vow. In this the devotee is weighed against bananas, sugar, jaggery, coconuts, sandalwood or any other article of daily use. The articles weighed are gifted to the temple. The proceeds from this ritual yielded Rs 1.9 crores during 1989-90 and Rs. 2.25 crores during 1990-91. On an average about 100 *tulabharams* are offered at the temple daily. On important days the number may go up to 200.

Of late, however, devotees use a wide range of items from coins and currency notes to cassettes and note books to *Narayaniyam*. Since anything that is permitted to be brought inside the temple could be used for *tulabharam*, the temple finds itself collecting daily such assorted materials as coir, grass, brooms, granite stones and even food articles like iddli and vada.

An offering of ice, five kilos of it, was Arumukham's tribute to the Lord for saving his 2-year-old daughter from the icy fingers of death. His daughter Jisha lay shivering in the deadly heat of an undiagnosed fever. Arumukham turned to the Lord for help. His prayers were answered when ice was put on the child. Arumuk-

ham vowed to offer *tulabharam* with ice, which he fulfilled.

K. Balakrishna Pillai is a manufacturer of a popular brand of domestic mixers. He had a very humble beginning in life. He attributes his flourishing success in business to the "grace of Guruvayurappan". A grateful Pillai weighed himself against mixers costing around Rs 10,850.

Interestingly, *tulabharam* is offered not for human beings alone but for material possessions also. A devotee conducted *tulabharam* for his motor cycle against tender coconuts. Another used coconuts for conducting a *tulabharam* for the film rolls of a movie before its release. Arrangements are made by the temple authorities for the conduct of *tulabharam* outside the temple when articles which are not permitted to be brought inside the temple are used. This is also the practice when non-Hindus offer *tulabharam*.

Indeed a phenomenon witnessed at Guruvayur over the years is the increasing number of non-Hindus making offerings, especially *tulabharam*. A Christian couple Verghese and Alice had been married for ten years and had no issue. As a last resort they prayed to Guruvayurappan and they were blessed with a child. They performed *tulabharam* for their infant with flute and also offered staging of Krishnanattam, dance of Krishna, the episode chosen being Avataram (See Chapter, on Krishnanattam).

Mohamed and his wife Asmabik had no issues for eight years after marriage. On the advice of their Hindu friends they resorted to the Lord of Guruvayur. They did

not have to wait for long before they were blessed with a child.

The grievance of another Muslim couple was different. They had a surfeit of children – nine in all, but all females. Their prayers for a male child were answered. They weighed the new-born with *Nentra* bananas.

The list goes on. Every month one or two cases like these happen, which point to the truth that God is one though the paths leading to Him are many and that faith works miracles.

Marriage - A man and a woman were formally married at the Guruvayur temple, with the bridegroom carrying their one-year old child. The man, a worker from Karivalloor in north Malabar said they could not get married before the child was born. Nonetheless they wanted to go through the ceremony in this holy town.

Such is the faith that hundreds of couples are united in wedlock every day before the Lord. On payment of the prescribed amount the couples are offered the holy water, prasada and the garlands to be exchanged by bride and groom. The ceremony is conducted on the specially erected platform outside the east *nada*.

Annaprasanam - This is the first feeding ceremony for the child and is daily conducted on a mass scale. The ceremony is held near the flag-staff at which the temple official offers tirtha and cooked rice, *payasam*, pappad, plantain etc., which are given to the child. It is conducted at the time of the *Pantirati*, *Uchcha* or *Athazha* puja. Tickets have to be purchased in advance.

Alroopams - There are miniature images in gold or silver to be placed before the Lord. The devotees can also keep a miniature replica of eye or leg or a hand or the whole human body, according to the vow taken for the cure of the disease in respect of the particular limb or the entire body. These images are available near the flag-staff and can be had from the temple attendant and placed after depositing whatever amount the devotee desires, in the hundi.

Devotees are warned against purchasing the images from outside.

Picking up of Kunnikuru - In order to develop intelligence and smartness in children, a handful of *Kun-nikuru* (abrus precatorious) is taken and deposited three times in the vessel kept near *Dipasthambha* to the south of the flag-staff. The amount vowed by the devotee is deposited in the hundi.

Bhagavati Azhal - This is favourite offering for Edatharikathu Kavil Bhagavati. Ten or twenty wicks soaked in oil are kept in the sheath of a plantain tree and lighted before the goddess. This is done after the night *diparadhana* and *athazha* puja.

Sayanapradakshina - Also known as *Angapradakshina*, the devotee circumambulates the temple, rolling along the *pradakshina* path. He will close his eyes tight and chant the Lord's names while rolling.

There are a variety of *archanas*, *alamkaras* and *naivedyams* which can be offered. Among *naivedyams*, the most common and which can be easily had, is sugar and plantain. Then there are various *payasams* which are

preparations from rice, jaggery, ghee, coconut, milk, condiment etc. in varying proportions. It is said that after the installation of the deity, Brihaspati (Guru) got Kamadhenu (the celestial wish cow) who by virtue of her gift produced these delicacies and the very first puja was performed with them and with butter and *Trimadhuram* as *naivedyams*. Hence the importance of these offerings.

A list of offerings consisting of 57 items is prominently displayed at the counters on the north side of the temple. The timings when ticket counters are open and when and where *naivedyams* prasadam etc. can be had are also displayed at the counters.

Compared to other big temples, touts are rare at Guruvayur, but one has to be wary.

Bhajan

Of the various offerings in the temple, which vary from a small archana to costly *udayasthamana* puja, the most fruitful and spiritually elevating is bhajan which is complete dedication of oneself to God, As Prof. Krishna Ayyar puts it: "Bhajan is the process of making the Infinite (Divinity, God) *Bhag* or part of oneself". There is no hard and fast rule for it. The ideal place for bhajan is the temple, because of the divine atmosphere and the company of like-minded people.

Those engaged in bhajan spend most of their time in the temple, associating themselves with everything that goes on within it, drinking only the water of its well, taking for food only the plain rice that is offered to the

Lord, smearing themselves with the sacred oil poured on the image, and marking their forehead with the sandal paste offered as Lord's prasada. It goes without saying that married people are expected to observe strict *bramacharya* during bhajan. At Guruvayur, the devotees are also expected to be present if possible for the twelve darshans from *nirmalyam* to *tripuka*, as King Janamejaya did as explained in chapter II on the origin of the Guruvayur temple.

The bhajan at Guruvayur is not exacting. It is left to the individual; it depends upon himself, his health and inclination. The harder the bhajan the greater is the concentration and therefore quicker and better the result. It is also not necessary that one should perform bhajan at Guruvayur itself; it can also be performed by proxy, in one's own home.

Prof Krishna Ayyar cites the miraculous cure of the daughter of a couple in Ooty. She was suffering from polio, which was so advanced that the legs had become so weak and thin like the dangling tale of an aged cow. The best treatment made available proved futile. In despair, the parents resorted to a native physician trained under the famous Tripangot Mussads – of them it is said that what they cannot cure no one can.

The physician in this case indeed felt that no one could cure the child. Since he did not wish to add to the parents' misery by telling so, he advised them to go to Guruvayur and undertake bhajan there. But as the child could not be taken to Guruvayur, the physician told them it was enough if they performed the bhajan at home. In any case it would make no difference, as according to the physician, the child was beyond cure.

As directed by him, the mother performed rigorous bhajan at home itself. On the 35th day the child was able to stand and on the 50th day it even walked. The parents came to the physician and presented him 10 sovereigns. Immensely surprised and thrilled by this concrete evidence of the Lord's healing power, he did not accept the present. Instead, he told them that it was the Lord who cured the child and therefore advised them to go to Guruvayur and offer it to the divine healer, asking them to bring him a picture of the Lord to be hung on his consulting room. The couple did so.

Bhajan is also observed to obtain one's cherished desire. Poontanam Nambudiri's only child died on the day fixed for his *annaprasanam* (see full story in chapter "Other Guruvayur Saints"). Overcome with grief, he came to Guruvayur, fully determined to secure the intercession of the Lord and recover his deceased son. His unswerving faith and adamant will inspired respect and awe, though some people even thought that Poontanam was mad. He was the first to come to the temple in the morning and the last to leave it at night, being meticulously present for all the 12 darshans.

Visualising his deceased son before his mind's eye, he began to repeat an improvised mantra, *Agaccha, Agaccha Balakrishna* (Come, Come Unnikrishna) some thousand times. And he reinforced this japa by writing the Bhagavata story of *Kumaraharanam* or Recovery of the Deceased Sons. Day after day, the full extent of Poontanam's sincerity, perseverance and faith was revealed in his realisation that little Krishna Himself took the place of his son in his heart!

"If by bhajan, Poontanam's grief can give place to joy, why not by a similar bhajan I should not get my health restored? If Poontanam can draw the Lord to his heart, can I not see Him before my eyes?" thus thought Mepattur Narayana Bhattatiri and made up his mind to start on a similar bhajan for hundred days. Like Poontanam, he reinforced his bhajan by writing an epitome of the Bhagavata and gave it the name of *Narayaniyam* (See chapter on *Narayaniyam*).

And Bhakta Siromani Vazhakunnam Nambudiri cured himself of his rheumatism by only reading *Narayaniyam* two or three times a day for five or six months. Unable to find even the little money that was required for a trip to Guruvayur, he remained at home, and meditating upon the Lord he built for himself a Guruvayur at home and performed his bhajan. (Read full story in chapter, Minstrels of Divine Glory).

A word about the real significance of making offerings to God would be appropriate here, especially when people feel that it is like entering into a contract with God. They appear to say: "God, please help me in getting this and, in return, I'll give this much in your name".

It would be wrong to regard offerings as a bribe given to the deity for a favour. It is actually a surrender of at least a part of our possessions. Renunciation, that is self-denial or giving up things is the real test of a true devotee. In the words of the Kaivalya Upanishad:

*Na karmanā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaikena
Amṛtatvam aśuḥ*

(Not by work, not by offspring nor wealth - only by renunciation does one attain immortality).

To illustrate this, Shri K.K.Menon, Special officer for Renovation of Guruvayur Temple, relates the experience of a wealthy mill-owner of Coimbatore* some years ago when he was Assistant Commissioner at Palni.

The mill-owner in question was suffering from a severe pain in his hand. He had consulted leading doctors in Madras, but to no avail. Once he and his wife attended a discourse on *Narayaniyam* by the late Sengalipuram Anantharama Dikshitar at Coimbatore. At the end, the mill-owner's wife made her husband promise that he would offer the diamond necklace he was wearing to Lord Guruvayurappan if he was cured. He had, however, a sentimental attachment to the necklace as it had been gifted to him by his grandfather. But he disregarded it and mentally resolved to offer it to Guruvayurappan. To his pleasant surprise, the pain now gradually subsided and the couple decided to make the promised visit to Guruvayur and deposit the necklace in hundi.

But, prior to their departure, the mill-owner who had second thoughts made enquiries with the leading diamond merchants at Coimbatore. They opined that the maximum price the necklace would fetch was Rs.3,500. He decided to be liberal and on reaching Guruvayur he deposited Rs.4,000 in the hundi in lieu of the necklace which he was reluctant to part with.

The couple returned to Coimbatore fully satisfied with the supreme sacrifice they had made. But to their

*Vazhivadu by K.K. Menon, "Shri Guruvayurappan" Magazine, April 1970.

dismay the husband got pain in his hand again. The family astrologer was consulted and right enough he attributed it to the wrath of the Lord. The couple had no other choice but to go to the Guruvayur again and deposit the precious jewel in the hundi. Needless to add that the pain too disappeared for ever within a week of their return home.

It should again be remembered that the Lord accepts whatever is given in devotion and rejects everything, however expensive, offered without devotion. This idea has been proclaimed by the Lord Himself in the Gita as follows:

Patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyā prayacchati

Tadam bhaktyupahṛtam asnāmi prayatātmanah.

(I accept and enjoy whatever is offered in devotion — leaf, flower, fruit or water, while what is given without devotion, however costly it may be does not conduce to my joy).

The gruel offered by Vidura was accepted with delight by Shri Krishna. The beaten rice hesitatingly brought by Sudama (Kuchela) was pulled out from the folds of his garment and partaken of with relish by Him. So too was he satisfied with the bit of leaf sticking to the utensil of Drapuati. In her anxiety to offer the best to Shri Rama, Sabari bit each fruit and gave it to the Lord after being satisfied that it was good. Lord Siva accepted the tongue-tainted venison and mouthful of water offered by the hunter Kannappa*

*The Bhagavad Gita, Commentary by Swami Chidbhavananda.

There are many more examples like these. The Lord along with Nanda and others was encamping at Mathura on the eve of the destruction of King Kamsa. When He along with Balarama went about sight-seeing, a tailor presented garments to them. As a result, the tailor was able to attain salvation. Later the Lord blessed the garland-maker Sudama who had joyfully presented Him with garlands and a bouquet and praised Him with Hymns. At the instance of the Lord, he chose two boons, viz. devotion and wealth which seldom exist together in one. Yet the Lord of Goddess Lakshmi readily granted both the boons as requested by His devotee.

Then there was the woman Kubja, the hunch back, who used to prepare the toiletry for Kamsa. On her way to the king's palace, she met Krishna and presented Him with scented ointment. To reveal the uprightness in her body that was in her mind, He removed her hunch and made her a beautiful woman. Her love towards the Lord was but another form of devotion.*

What matters to the Lord therefore is bhakti. Material abundance is of no avail to gain access to the Lord. It is disinterested devotion to which the Lord submits Himself. The incidents at Mathura also indicate that only the meritorious could have a glimpse of the Lord. In fact, as poet Bhattatiri describes, the Lord set out along with His companions to see the city as if being dragged by the chains of the merits of the citizens like the tailor, Sudama or Kubja.

**Narayaniyam*, Commentary by P.N. Menon.

The Lord further elaborates:

Yatkaroshi yadaśnāsi yajjuhosi dadāsi yat

Yattapasyasi Kaunteya tatkurshva madarpaṇam

(Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you gift away, whatever austerity you practice, O Kaunteya (Arjuna), do it as an offering to me).

The panacea for all the evils of earthly life is prescribed here,. Making gifts is often for self-advertisement. Practising austerity with self-interest may bring in spiritual vanity. But when all these good deeds are done for the glory of the Lord, the doer emerges as the divine. The turning point in life comes in dedicating everything to God, instead of petitioning to Him for things here and hereafter.*

It is with this understanding that we should offer to the Lord whatever we can, but with devotion.

CHAPTER IX

FESTIVALS

"A temple in Kerala", writes K.P.S. Menon in his autobiography, "is at once a house of prayer, a social club and a cultural centre". This is particularly true during the annual festival (utsavam) which almost every temple in Kerala conducts. Not only is it a special occasion for worship, it provides opportunities for social rejoicing. People gather in their thousands from surrounding villages and towns to participate in the general merriment. Fairs and exhibitions are held, also music and dance recitals.

There are temples where the utsavam lasts as long as ten days or even more. The hoisting of the temple flag usually marks the beginning of the celebrations. While the flag-staff elsewhere in India are very short, in Kerala they are 60 to 70 feet high. In the better endowed shrines like Guruvayur they are gold plated while in others they are covered with copper. Where there is no permanent flag-staff, make-shift ones are provided with arecanut poles or bamboo for the duration of the festival. Elaborate pujas are held during the flag-hoisting ceremony.

The procession of elephants is a distinctive feature of Kerala temple festivals. Gorgeously caparisoned elephants with colourful parasols and *alavattams* held aloft over them and *chamaras* swinging provide a grand spectacle. The processional deity, *thidambu*, is carried on

the tallest elephant which is flanked by others in the order of their heights. The number of elephants employed is a matter of prestige for the festival (At the famous Pooram celebrations in Thrissur as many as 30 elephants participate). The procession is led by various drums, horns and pipes. A special concert of instruments is known as the Panchavadyam consisting of the *tinjala*, the *maddalam*, the *edakka*, the *elathalam*, the *kombu* (and also the conch). The *nadaswaram* is also sometimes played.

The festivals include entertainment programmes like Kathakali, the famous dance-drama, *Ottantullal*, *Chakyarkuttu* (narration of a story based on Sanskrit text with commentary in Malayalam interspersed with narrator's wit), *pathakam* (story-telling), music etc. Display of fire works at night is another attraction. Debates and religious discourses are also held by scholars to propagate Hindu dharma and inculcate bhakti among people. In the old days it was customary to feed Brahmins in special sheds or *uttupuras* which could seat thousands.

The festival culminates in the *Aarattu* when the deity is bathed in the temple tank or a nearby river amidst the chanting of mantras. Devotees also have a holy dip alongwith the deity, which is considered to be highly auspicious. Thereafter the temple flag is lowered signifying the end of the ceremonies.

Apart from annual festivals there are seasonal festivals (described later) during 'Vaisakha', 'Mandalam' etc. In addition there are days of special significance. But the essential features like special pujas, elephant procession,

music, gathering of large crowds etc are common to all festivals. On this account everyday is a day of festivities at Guruvayur. But there are occasions which are marked by special celebrations, pomp and grandeur.

Mandalam

The 'Mandalam' begins from the first of the solar month of *Vrischikam* (mid-November) and lasts 41 days. The period is regarded as highly auspicious throughout Kerala. This is the time for the pilgrimage to the shrine of Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimala: millions of devotees observe austerities in preparation for the arduous trek to Sabari Hills. The pilgrims visit important shrines on the way and a visit to Guruvayur is always included in their itinerary. There is thus a big rush of pilgrims at Guruvayur during the season.

Says a report in *Bhaktapriya* (January 1992), an official publication of Guruvayur Devaswom: "There was an incessant flow of pilgrims, especially of Ayyappa devotees from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The income from hundi during the period from November 10 to the first week of December 1991 alone was a record Rs.29,90,388. Besides there were Rs.29,000 worth Indira Vikas Patrika, one kilo, 958 grams gold and two kilos 757 grams silver".

Abhishekam with *Panchagavya* - a mixture of five elements belonging to the cow (milk, curd, ghee, urine and cowdung) is a speciality during the season. This is done after *Pantirati*. Many devotees visit the shrine now to partake of it, since it is believed to burn up all inner impurities. The concluding day of the Mandalam is marked by the *Kalabhabhishekam* of the deity. This spe-

cial offering is made only once a year and it is the hereditary privilege of the Zamorin Rajah to make it.

Besides, the three *Sivelis* during 'Mandalam' will be conducted with three elephants and special musical instruments. *Chakyar kuttu* is also conducted for 12 days. The right to conduct this traditionally belongs to Kuttancheri Chakyar.

The famous Guruvayur Ekadasi festival, Meppatur pratima installation day, *Narayaniyam* day and Kuchela day also occur during 'Mandalam' making it the busiest season at Guruvayur.

Ekadasi Festival

Ekadasi, the eleventh day of every lunar fortnight, is very auspicious to Hindus in general. Of the 24 Ekadasis in a year, some have special significance, like Ashada Ekadasi in Pandharpur (Maharashtra), Vaikuntha Ekadasi in Srirangam (Tamil Nadu) and Vrischika Ekadasi (Sukla Paksha) in Guruvayur.

The Ekadasi festival is the most important occasion during the 'Mandalam' season when tens of thousands visit the shrine to have a glimpse of the deity. As mentioned earlier, even before the temple entry proclamation in 1935, all Hindus irrespective of caste or creed were allowed to enter the temple on this day. There is a story that an orthodox Nambudiri was perturbed at the sight of many *avarnas* (Harijans) at the temple. He complained to the Sage Vilvamangalam that the temple had been defiled. The redoubtable Swami smiled and asked him to touch his body when, lo, the old Brahmin saw every devotee as Sri Krishna Himself.

The Ekadasi celebrations begin nearly a month in advance. By way of a prelude there is *Vilakku*, a festival of lights, on all these days: gaily caprisoned elephants are taken in procession round the temple after the night puja to the accompaniment of the usual drums. The rows of lights on the *Vilakkumatam* around the *nalambalam* and the majestic *dipasthambams* inside and outside the temple are lighted. The spectacle provided is indeed eye-filling.

The expenses of the *Vilakku* on different days are met out of contributions from certain families who have been recipients of the blessings of Lord Guruvayurappan at one time or another. Here is the true story of one such family: Some fifty years ago two devotees, a brother and a sister from an ancient family in Koladi, came here to pray during the Ekadasi festival. The sister was past forty and had no children. While the astrologers had predicted that she would have no issue, a renowned doctor of Madras had advised a surgical operation if at all she was to conceive. The brother and sister prayed devotedly and vowed that, if by Guruvayurappan's grace a child was born to the sister they would bear the expenses of the illumination on the ninth day (Navami) of the festival. As though by a miracle, before the next Navami *Vilakku*, she gave birth to a son. Since then the expenses of the *Navami Vilakku*, which till then were met by the head priest of the temple, are borne by the Koladi family*

As described earlier, it was on Ekadasi that Sri Sankaracharya, in his celestial voyage with Narada, came down at Guruvayur and remained there for 41 days and prescribed the elaborate puja routine for the temple.

*"Guruvayur Ekadasi", by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, *Bhavan's Journal*, Annual Number, August 10, 1969.

It was also on this day that the Lord revealed the Gita to Arjuna. The day further commemorates the story of Govardhana Yaga which Krishna performed instead of the Indra Yaga, which the people of Gokulam used to conduct till then evidently to appease Indra. Indra felt offended and sent his thunder bolt to destroy the whole of Gokulam. When the innocent people cried out in fear and prayed to Krishna for protection, he lifted up the mountain of Govardhana and gave shelter to them. Indra thus humbled, asked for Krishna's forgiveness. Legend has it that on Guruvayur Ekadasi day Indra comes with Kamadenu (Surabhi) and gives all material wealth and offers worship to receive Krishna's blessings.

Above all, Guruvayur is further rendered holy with the belief that on Ekadasi day, all the tirthas like Kashi, Badri, Sabarigiri and Palani, besides all the rivers like the Ganga and the Yamuna assemble in the sacred precincts. Small wonder, the Guruvayur Ekadasi is considered the most holy of all Ekadasis.

Especially, the last three days of the festival namely, Navami, Dasami and Ekadasi attract maximum crowds. A distinguishing feature of the Navami *Vilakku* is that all the lamps in the temple are lit with ghee donated by the Koladi family which, as mentioned earlier, conducts the festival on this day. The entire Guruvayur wears a festive look on these days with the temple and the surrounding areas decked with festoons and electrical illumination.

The Dasami *Vilakku* which used to be an offering of Zamorin Raja, is now conducted by Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust established by the late Namaacharya Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri. After the temple is opened

on this day for *nirmalya* darshan, it is closed only at 9.00 a.m. on Dwadasi day, thus allowing continuous darshan for devotees throughout Dasami and Ekadasi days.

A highlight of the festival on this day is the memorial service for Gajarajan, the late Guruvayur Kesavan (read detailed story in Chapter XIV). Witnessed by a large crowd of devotees, the *karanavar*, the head of the elephant family, places a wreath in front of the statue of Kesavan at Sree Valsam guest house compound, all the other pachyderms standing around and paying obeisance to their departed leader.

Earlier, most of the 40 elephants of the devaswom would go on a procession from Punnathur Kotta, the abode of the elephants. Then they go to the Parthasarathy temple, carrying a portrait of Kesavan. Thereafter, they trudge to the Krishna temple and have darshan of the Lord. The pachyderms are then lined up on both sides of the eastern gateway of the temple where they are served a sumptuous feast consisting of sugar cane, banana, jaggery, prasadam etc.

On Ekadasi day, the *udayasthamana* puja is conducted by the devaswom itself. This was formerly the privilege of Chiralayam royal family which also gave a sumptuous feast on Dwadasi day. After the morning *Siveli* on Ekadasi day, there is a grand elephant procession accompanied by *Panchavadyam* to Parthasarathi temple since the day is also reckoned as Geethopadesam day. The same day after the night puja the famous Ekadasi illumination (*Vilakku*) with elephant procession that take place inside the temple provide a grand finale to the month-long festival.

On Dwadasi day there is a custom of offering a token amount called Dwadasi *panam* in Kuttambalam. Thereafter around 9 a.m. the temple doors are closed. They are opened again at 4.30 p.m. after the purificatory ceremony.

Chembai Music Festival

As part of the Ekadasi fete, an 11-day Chembai music festival is organised, in which an incredible array of some 2,000 Carnatic musicians give of their best. A vast gathering of musicians and rasikas assemble daily to pay homage to the late Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, the doyen of Carnatic music and a great devotee of Guruvayurappan, in whose memory the festival is held. It is almost as though Tiruvaiyar (where the famous aradhana festival is held every January to honour the memory of Saint Thyagaraja) is transplanted to Guruvayur. (See Chapter, Minstrels of Divine Glory for full story of Chembai.)

In the early days, the festival used to be a three-day affair. As the number of participants increased steadily over the years, the period was extended with some 2000 artistes, young and old, novices and vidwans, vocalists and instrumentalists, participating every day. Even children who are learning music are allowed entry, as Chembai always encouraged budding musicians. The participants are given free food and accommodation as also prasad.

A highlight of the utsavam is the group singing of Saint Thyagaraja's famous *pancharatna kritis* on Dasami day by several leading musicians, which contributed to the grandeur of the occasion.

A similar group concert marks the end of the festival on the night of Ekadasi. This includes five of Chembai's most favourite songs - '*Vatapiganapatim*' (Hamsadhvani), '*Rakshamsaranagatam*' (Natta), '*Paavana guru pavana Puradeeswara*' (Hamsanandi) '*Mamava sadaajanani*' (Kanada) and '*Karuna Cheivan entu thamasam Krishna*' (Yadukula kamboji).

The entire audience join the chorus when the last mentioned song is sung with devotion and fervour, the music reverberating the hall sending everyone to ecstasy.

Narayaniyam Day

Bhakta Kavi Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri is believed to have completed *Narayaniyam* and dedicated it to Guruvayurappan on *Vrischikam* 28 (around December 14) - This day is commemorated as *Narayaniyam Day* every year when *Narayaniya saptaham*, debates on the subject, competition in recitation of the poem for school and college students etc. are held and prizes awarded (For details on *Narayaniyam* see Chapter. XI)

Meppathur Pratima installation day

To perpetuate the memory of Meppattur, a statue has been installed in the compound of the poet's house at Chandanakavu in Malappuram district of Kerala. This memorial was installed on *Vrischikam* 8 (around November 24) which is commemorated by reciting *Narayaniyam* on the spot and organising cultural programmes in which large number of natives and devotees from outside take part.

Kuchela's Day

This is observed on the first Wednesday of *Dhanu* (December- January) to commemorate Kuchela. He was a poverty-stricken Brahmin. One day when his wife could not stand the sight of their children crying out in hunger, she remembered that her husband and Krishna had been classmates. So she suggested to him, "why don't you go and see your old friend? He will be of help". Reluctantly he agreed. He carried a small gift of beaten rice in the folds of his garment.

At Dwaraka he was received affectionately by Krishna. After exchanging the usual courtesies, Krishna asked him, "what have you brought me?" Kuchela did not reply; he was ashamed of the humble gift he was carrying with him. The Lord who sees all, saw this, snatched the bundle of beaten rice, untied it and ate a handful with relish. The two friends recalled old incidents from their early school life. Thus Kuchela passed a night in the company of the Lord. In the ecstasy he forgot the purpose of his visit. And soon he took leave of his old friend. But on his return to his place, Kuchela found to his surprise a palatial building in the very same spot where his humble hut had stood.

Was not the grace and blessing of the Lord who had partaken of his humble gift of beaten rice all too evident? The Bhaktavatsala that He is, the Lord not only blessed Kuchela with wealth but also helped him attain moksha. It is to commemorate this episode that Kuchela Day is observed at Guruvayur. Needless to say that beaten rice is offered in abundance by devotees on this occasion.

Utsavam

Next to the Ekadasi festival, the 10-day Utsavam conducted in the month of *Kumbha* (February-March) is another major attraction. It is celebrated with pomp and pageantry, but the accent is on the various Tantric rites which are important for the prosperity of the temple. It commences under the constellation of Pushya and lasts ten days, marked by rituals, grand feasts, procession of elephants and illumination.

As a forerunner of the festival, a seven-day ritual called *Sahasrakalasam* (literally, thousand water pots) is held. This is a very expensive affair and is conducted only rarely at other temples. According to *Tantrasamuchaya*, *Sahasrakalasam* should be conducted at least once in twelve years. At Guruvayur it is held every year after the 1970 fire disaster.

Elaborate rites and homas mark the ceremonies every day. But the most important days are the last day and the day preceding the start of the utsavam attracting thousands of devotees. Over thousand pots are filled with water and sanctified with tantra and mantra on the seventh day of the *kalasam*. The next day the *Brahma Kalasa abhisheka* is performed on the deity.

One thousand silver pots, twenty five golden pots and a special golden pitcher, which are used for the ceremony, are arranged in the *Kuttambalam* which is specially decorated for the purpose. The pots are ceremonially taken in procession from here to *Srikoil* and *abhishekam* is performed by *Tantri* amidst chanting of mantras. The *abhishekam* starts around 7.30 a.m. after *Pantirati* puja

and lasts till 11.30. Thereafter *Irattipayasam* is offered to the deity followed by *Uchcha* puja. The entire function is conducted by the temple *Tantri*, observing penance, assisted by several purohits.

A feature of the 10-day Utsavam which follows *Sahasrakalasam* is *anayottam*, the elephant race on the inaugural day. Some selected elephants, out of the temple's forty-odd elephants, take part in the race. They stand in a line at Manjula before they are made to run towards the temple. However only some five to eight elephants are allowed to run inside the temple. The one which arrives first normally stays within the temple walls for the duration of the festival, receiving royal treatment, partaking of the Lord's prasada and carrying His *thidambu* during processions.

The origin of this custom goes back to the olden days when the Devaswom did not own any elephant. It was the practice in those days for big land-owners, aristocrats and philanthropists to offer their elephants free of charge to the temple on festival days. Once there was no elephant available at the start of the ceremonies since all the elephants in the area had been hired out for a festival in another temple called Trikkanamathilakam near Kodungallur. The authorities at Guruvayur were in a fix. Then a miracle happened. One of the elephants participating in the Trikkanamathilakam festival suddenly turned back, fled towards Guruvayur and presented itself in time for the ceremonies there. It is to commemorate this event that the elephant race is held even today which is witnessed by thousands with excitement. Since this event, no elephant is taken in procession for the morning *Siveli* on the inaugural day of the festival.

At the appointed time at night on the inaugural day, the *Tantri* hoists the temple flag amidst various rites marking the beginning of the festival.

On the following six days of the Utsavam, there are elephant processions three times, i.e. in the morning, in the afternoon and at night. There is also *Sribhuta bali* (offering of oblation at various altars) conducted in the morning after *Pantirati* puja and at night before the procession. Thereafter the deity is kept in a little decorated shrine on the northern side and renowned drummers of Kerala play '*tayambaka*' (a pleasing orchestra of chendas and cymbals) before the *Vilakku* or night procession.

On all these days, outside the temple, religious discourses, entertainment programmes like music, dance etc. are continuously held.

On the eighth day is *Utsavabali* which is a very important part of the festival. It starts around 10.00 a.m. after the morning procession and lasts till 4.00 p.m. when oblations are offered to Lord's lieutenants. Thousands from far and near gather to witness this ritual and to have darshan of the deity which is kept within the *matilakam*. Thereafter the devotees are treated to a sumptuous feast.

In old days, not only devotees but also animals and birds were fed. A basketful of cooked rice used to be hung from one of the branches of Manjula to be eaten by birds.

The ninth day festival is marked by *Pallivetta* or the hunting expedition of the Lord, which is as important as *Utsavabali*. At 6 O'Clock in the evening the processional

deity is brought outside and kept near the flag-staff. Then Diparadhana is performed, not by *Melsanti* but by one of the assistant priests who is selected for the purpose. Normally only *Melsanti* can perform Diparadhana for the deity, but on *Pallivetta* and *aarattu* days *kizhusantis* are vouchsafed this privilege.

After Diparadhana, the procession with three elephants is led outside the temple and goes round the outer walls and the temple tank. Large crowds gather to see this glittering procession while Bhagavan is greeted with *nirapara* and lighted lamps by households.

By the time the procession returns to the temple it is full of people to witness the *Pallivetta*. The deity is taken on another elephant and goes outside the east *nada* upto Kalyana mandapam. From there the hunting expedition returns to the temple and goes nine rounds running. Men put on the guise of the boar and other animals and birds and join the procession. *Pallivetta* is symbolic of the Lord hunting the boar and catching it. It also denotes the destruction of such evils as *kama*, *krodha* (desire, anger) etc that plague us in the jungle of life. After the hunting expedition, the tired Bhagavan is supposed to sleep in the forest itself. Hence the deity is kept on the mandapam inside the temple to be woken up at 6.00 a.m. the next morning on *Aarattu* day.

On this day, the tenth and final day of the Utsavam, the temple is open around 7 a.m. In the evening after the *Siveli*, around 5.30 the divine *chaitanya* of the deity is invoked in a *vighraha* made of Panchaloha which is taken outside and kept near the flag-staff. The assistant priest chosen for the purpose the previous day performs

Diparadhana before the image is mounted on the elephant for *Aarattu* procession.

The procession, like the previous day, goes round the temple and the tank, people all along the street greeting the Lord. The deity is brought down to the temple tank in front of the Bhagvati temple. After special pujas, it is dipped in the holy water amidst the chanting of mantras. At this auspicious moment, thousands of people also bathe alongwith the Lord chanting His name. The place is said to acquire the sanctity of Varanasi and the holy rivers like the Ganga and the Yamuna. A bath at that time is therefore considered to be exceptionally purifying, washing away one's sins committed during the previous year.

After the *Aarattu* the *uchcha* puja of the deity (actually this day it takes place at night) is conducted at the Bhagavati temple. The Lord then returns to the *garba griha* after eleven circumambulations executed at a fast pace. Thus the festival which starts with the elephant race also ends with it. The temple flag is now lowered marking the end of the festival.

Special mention must be made of the daily feeding of thousands of pilgrims with the Kerala speciality - Kanji, *puzhukku*, pappad, coconut pieces and jaggery. The rich and the poor alike partake of this prasada served on the two floors of the *Uttupura*. Each floor can seat about 1300 people at a time and daily 4/5 batches are served during the festival period. Nearly 40 cooks and helpers are engaged for preparing kanji and the Devaswom is said to incur nearly 75 per cent of the festival expenses for this purpose.

Two incidents connected with the utsavam, related by late Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri are worth recalling: A feature of the *Aarattu* puja is the bathing of the deity with tender coconut milk. The tender coconuts are provided by a particular family and there is a story about it.

Once a Nambudiri boy appeared at the gates of an Ezhava (Ezhavas belong to Depressed classes) house and saying that "he" was extremely thirsty asked for two tender coconuts to be sent to the temple tank where the '*Aarattu*' was being conducted. The Ezhava, who was an ardent devotee of the Lord, soon arrived at the eastern gate with the coconuts which were offered to the deity. He was overwhelmed by the Lord's gesture and could not restrain the tears of joy that welled in his eyes. How often God himself goes to His devotees without invitation and in such mysterious ways?

Following this incident the house of the Ezhava hallowed by the visit of the Lord was named by devotees as Tampuran Patikkal (literally the gate sanctified by the Lord) and since then it has been the privilege of this Ezhava family to offer tender coconuts during the *Aarattu*.

The second incident took place in 1942. Polpakara Manakkal Kunjan Nambudiripad had officiated as the head priest six or seven times. It was he who first started decorating the deity at dawn in the form of Balagopala, (this is referred to in the chapter on daily worship). How many thousands of devotees feast their eyes on this delightful child Krishna, with anklets, red loincloth, flute placed in the mouth and butter in hand.,

After retiring from Guruvayur, Kunjan Nambudiripad settled at Mavelikkara near Alleppey. But every year he came to Guruvayur during the utsavam and observed bhajan for twelve days following the *Aarattu*. In the year 1942 also he came as usual to his Illam at Kumaranellore to perform his father's *sradha* (death anniversary). He, however, informed his friends at Guruvayur that he was not able to go over to witness the Utsavam as he was not too well. Yet on 'Aarattu' day he arrived at Guruvayur post-haste to the surprise of his friends.

He explained to them that the Lord appeared in his dream the previous night and said: "I have not forgotten the days you served me and decorated me for the delight of my devotees. Even if my bhaktas do not wish to have my darshan I do wish to see them during *Aarattu*." The erstwhile head priest was choked with emotion and was beside himself with joy. Such is the infinite mercy the Lord bestows on his devotees.

Vishu

The first of Metam (mid-April) is the day of Vishu, which in a way is New Year's Day for Malayalis. People of Kerala as a rule believe that the fortunes for the year depend on the nature of objects one sees in the morning of Vishu. For this purpose, the previous evening they arrange in front of the family deity a *Kani* (an omen) displaying auspicious articles like yellow flowers of *Konna* tree (*Cassia fistula*), raw rice, betel leaves, betel nuts, golden coloured cucumber, golden coins etc.

Thousands prefer to go to Guruvayur to see *Kani* and to have the eye-filling darshan of the Lord. *Kani* is ar-

ranged on *mukhamandapam* in front of the deity. In a golden *uruli* (circular vessel) the Lord's *thidambu* is kept, decorated with *alavattom*, *chamaram* etc.

Milling crowds stay over night inside the courtyard of the temple, which is specially permitted by the Devas-wom. They blind fold themselves and set their eyes on the *Kani* and the radiant deity, as the doors are as usual opened at 3 a.m. for darshan.

Vaisakha

The Vaisakha is the lunar month commencing from the day following the new moon of Metam (April-May) to the following new moon. The Vaisakha *vrata* or observance of austerities during this month is considered specially sacred to Vishnu. As the saying goes: There is no yuga like Kali, no tirtha like the Ganga and no *vrata* like Vaisakha.

The importance of Vaisakha and the mode of observance of the *vrata* are detailed in Skanda Purana.

The main features of the vow: early morning ablutions when the waters are believed to be sanctified by the presence of the Ganga and other gods and goddesses; feeding the poor, abstinence from stale food; partaking of food after it has been offered to the Lord; practising *namasankirtana*; listening to religious discourses; in short, participating in everything divine.

The third day in the bright half of Vaisakha, known as Akshaya Tritiya is the most auspicious day of the month – it is also the birth day of Balarama. This day is

considered so holy that auspicious functions are held and charities are performed.

It is stated that "Lord Vishnu caused the Divine Ganga to flow on the earth on Vaisakha Sukla Tritiya" It naturally follows that bathing in the Ganga and worshipping Lord Vishnu on the day are particularly propitious.

There was a king called Dharmikan in ancient Panchala. He was valorous and mighty and was endowed with prosperity. But, despite his valour and prowess, he lost his kingdom to his enemies and was exiled to the forest. There he lived the life of a hunter. Once he invoked his family guru to ascertain the cause of his suffering.

The guru told him that he had been a hunter in a previous birth. Never devoted to God, he indulged in such despicable acts like drinking, hunting, dacoity etc. Once he robbed two merchants and killed one of them. A maharshi who was watching this took fright and ran for his life. While doing so he fell down on the way on account of exhaustion. The hunter, however, saw him and tended him. By virtue of this act he was born as a king in his next life.

On the advice of the Guru, Dharmikan observed Vaisakha *vrata* in atonement. The Lord, pleased with his devotion appeared before him and blessed him. That day is Akshaya Tritiya which is hence specially holy during the Vaisakha month.

While the observance of Vaisakha *vrata* is efficacious every where, at Guruvayur it is particularly so. A prince

belonging to the ruling family of the erstwhile Travancore State was a great devotee. A saint presented him with a salagrama which the prince treasured and worshipped with great devotion. He and his subjects, however, suffered a series of disasters.

The prince sought the saint and asked his advice. He was told that if the salagrama was worshipped in the presence of Lord Vishnu good results would follow. The prince, therefore, resorted to the family deity Sri Padmanabha. Yet things did not improve.

Finally, he betook himself to Guruvayur and dedicated the salagrama to Guruvayurappan. It is believed that in due course it merged with the idol. Since then the princely family used to offer *palpayasam* during the mid-day puja to Guruvayurappan, which practice continued for several years.

These two legends indicate why Vaisakha is specially holy at Guruvayur and attracts hundreds of thousands of devotees. The devotees have darshan of the Lord during all the pujas; and participating in the *sivelis*, listening to Bhagavata and other religious discourses, they remain in constant bliss. Four Bhagavata saptahas are arranged by the Devaswom to cover the entire Vaisakha month.

Ashtami Rohini

Another important festive day at Guruvayur is Janmashtami, the day of Lord Krishna's birth. He was born under the Rohini Nakshatra on the eighth day of the waning moon of Sravana. This falls in the month of Chingam (July-August). A *niramala* and *Vilakku* on a grand

scale are conducted as offering by the staff of Devaswom. Appam (cakes made of rice paste and jaggery) is offered by devotees in abundance as it is considered the most favourite for God on the day.

Festivals at the Bhagavati Temple

The Navaratri festival, as the very name indicates, is observed for nine days. Trikala puja, recitals of Lalita Sahasranamam, (a thousand names of the Goddess), display of lights around the temple are the special features observed during the celebrations.

Another occasion for celebration in this temple is the 'Talapoli' which comes in the month of Dhanu (December-January). In fact, this is a function which every Bhagavati shrine in Kerala conducts during the month. It is a one-day celebration with the customary *Kalamezhuthu* (decorative design of the Devi on the floor), singing of devotional songs and procession. The expenses are met by public subscription.

CHAPTER X

KRISHNANATTAM

Of cultural programmes and religious discourses conducted at Guruvayur, special mention must be made of the dance-drama known as Krishnanattam - the dance of Krishna - which is very popular. Krishnanattam was written in the wake of the twelfth century Bengali poet, Saint Jayadeva's Gita Govinda (song of Govinda or Krishna) which became a popular poetical work in Kerala a little over three hundred years ago.

Prince (afterwards the Zamorin) Manaveda of Calicut (A.D. 1595 - 1658), a great scholar and poet who was very much attached to the Guruvayur temple was fascinated by this song and arranged for its recital in the temple every day. Inspired by his own experience with the Lord of Guruvayur he wrote a series of eight dramas called Krishna Geeti representing the important incidents in the life of Lord Krishna. When he turned it into an enchanting dance - drama it came to be known as Krishnanattam. All this took place in 1654.

It is said that once the Zamorin in his excessive devotion to Sri Krishna actually spotted Him playing near about the present Kuttambalam where there used to be an Elanji tree. As he ran up eagerly to the divine child to hold him in his hands the Boy disappeared instantly. But in the process the Raja caught hold of a peacock feather adorning Krishna's hair. Tradition has it that it

is the same feather which adorned the crown of the actor who played the role of Krishna in Krishnanattam for several years.

Narayaniyam, of whose author he was a friend and admirer, was another source of inspiration to Manaveda. And like *Narayaniyam*, Krishna Geeti depicts predominantly the author's devotion to his favourite deity Lord Krishna. He has also drawn freely from Book X and XI of Bhagavata.

Having witnessed Kudiyaattam, the oldest Sanskrit drama in Kerala, performed by Chakiars, there was a common desire to improve the art further and afford greater enjoyment to spectators. The outcome was rendering the poem in abhinaya (drama gestures). Make-up and costumes also resemble those of Kudiyaattam.

Besides, Krishnanattam is the only classical theatre in Kerala which makes use of colourful masks donned especially by those characters having to do not much of facial action like demoniac or evil characters. The use of masks is derived from folk rituals such as Tirayattam and Theyyam.

Some scholars place the origin of Krishnanattam in or about the fourteenth century. Irrespective of the date of adaptation of the Gita Govinda into dance-drama, the point of interest is that in the Krishnanattam arose the special technique of presentation that came to be the characteristic expressional feature of the future Kathakali. In Krishnanattam, the actor was relieved of the necessity of narrating the story, and set free to give his attention to entirely to the elaborate work of bodily gesture (abhinaya) and hand-language (angya). The sing-

ing was entrusted to another participant who became the voice of the actor, a change that put upon the audience the extended imaginative task of unifying the two exponents of sound and sight into one mental and emotional entity*.

Writes Dr. Kunjunni Raja: "Kathakali which is now the most popular of the dance dramas of Kerala owes much to Kudiyattam and Krishnanattam. The whole scheme of acting and the hand poses and gestures were bodily adopted in Kathakali from Koodiyattam. The facial make-up and costumes, it borrowed from Koodiyattam and Krishnanattam. There are five different types of make-up in Kathakali: Katti, Kari, Paccha, Tati (both vella and chuvanna) and Minukku but in Krishnanattam there is more variety. The latter also makes use of masks quite frequently. The great importance given to the element of music in Krishnanattam was adopted by Kathakali. The rules that the actors are not to speak, but their words are to be sung by separate musicians positioned behind them, was also first made in Krishnanattam and later borrowed by Kathakali."

However, Chenda (drum), which is the leading instrument in Kathakali, is not used in Krishnanattam. Sudha Maddalam and edakka, cymbals, gong and sankha (conch) are used. Further, no painted wooden mask is used in Kathakali.

Krishnanattam is presented in eight episodes from incarnation (avataram) to ascent to Heaven (swargarohanam): "Avatara," 'Kaliyamardana', 'Rasakrida', 'Kamsa Vadhā', 'Swayamvara', 'Banayuddha', 'Vivida

*Dance-Drama and shadow play by J.H. Cousim, *The Arts and Crafts of Kerala*. Paico Publishing House.

vadha' and 'Swargarohana'. The episodes are presented on eight consecutive nights. Since the last story is considered inauspicious, the 'Avatara' is once again enacted on the ninth day.

The Zamorin who maintained the troupe used to inaugurate the play each year in his own palace at Calicut. Thereafter, the artists went to Guruvayur and performed there for nine days consecutively. The troupe used to tour the Malabar district staging performances in the homes of well-to-do families before they return to Calicut.

The Guruvayur Devaswom now maintains the troupe which is the one and only Krishnanattam troupe available today. The Kshetra Kalanilayam imparts rigorous training to performing members of the troupe. The training starts at the age of 6 and the day begins at 2.30 a.m. The training lasts 10 to 12 years and includes strenuous physical exercises, body massage etc.

Since witnessing Krishnanattam is regarded as an act of piety - Manaveda himself presented it as a routine offering to Lord Guruvayurappan - devotees can offer this as a *vazhivadu* on payment of the prescribed amount. According to tradition the dance is staged on the northern side of the temple after the closure of the temple at night. It is completed before the opening of the *Srikoil* at 3 a.m.

It is believed that each day's performance yields a particular benefit to the devotees who make the offering. Avatara is offered for the birth of a child; Kaliyamardana to offset the effect of poison; Rasakreeda for well being of unmarried girls and to end quarrels between couples; Kamsavadha to eliminate enemies; Swayamvara for speeding up matrimony; Banayudha is auspicious on

birth days to accomplish cherished wishes; Vivida vadha to eliminate poverty and to increase yield from farms and Swargarohana for peace of a departed soul.

All the episodes in a series or each individually, can be offered depending on the wish of the devotee. Those who offer Swargarohana must however conduct Avatara too the next day. The charges for each play is Rs. 800/- if conducted within the precincts of Guruvayur temple. For performances outside Guruvayur, besides Rs. 800 per play, travelling and other expenses have to be borne by the devotee engaging the troupe.

Here is how Rustom Bharucha, theatre scholar and writer, describes the performance of Krishnanattam at Guruvayur temple based on first-hand experience.*

"No performance of Krishnanattam can start without the lighting of the central oil lamp, the *vilakku* which has to be a lit by a Brahmin. Only then can the musicians and drummers pick up their four instruments that are placed in front of the lamp. The *thopi maddalam*, the *suddha maddalam*, the *chengala* and the *elathalam* are more than drums and cymbals; they are carriers of sound energies that embody the divine. No actor (including Krishna) can make his entrance before touching these instruments in order to receive their blessings.

"Once the musicians pick up the instruments, the *keli* begins, a percussive announcement heralding the imminence of the play. One cue, two of the *pettikar* or stagehands hold up the multi-coloured rectangular *thirassila* (curtain) behind the lamp and ground of the performance,

* The January-March 1988 number of *Journal of Arts and Ideals*



"Krishnanattam — The dance of Krishna, is very popular, witnessed by devotees as an act of piety."



which is first touched by four female characters, fully costumed and bedecked in *minukku* (polished) make-up.

“Here in the concealed space, they dance the *thodayam*, a formal piece set to fixed *taals*. No one in the audience is meant to see this dance: it is performed specifically to invoke the blessings of Ganapati, Vishnu and Devi. But if the performers dance for the gods, they also dance for themselves in preparation for the performance. The *thodayam* is also a kind of warm-up.

“Bhakti pervades Krishnanattam, the love of Krishna being evoked in any number of ways. Open and beckoning, the spectacle invites the participation of pilgrims, who can feast their eyes on the Lord in his frolic, killings and love.

“The various scenes provide numerous opportunities for *darshanam*, the curtain being used to conceal the Lord and then opened to display him in all his solitary splendour. As the spectators wait for his entrance, which is always announced with a scattering of flowers, there is a gradual welling of emotions that leads to a climax, which subsides once more into an expectant calm, only to build yet again for another glimpse of Krishna.

“In this context, it is not uncommon to see spectators fold their hands devoutly even when Krishna is not on stage. During one performance, I saw a sadhu kneel before the bear-king Jambavan, even though Krishna was standing alongside him. Perhaps, he felt an affinity to his bhakta in whom Krishna lives.

“While Kathakali may transport the spectator into another world through its brilliant theatricality, Krish-

nanattam embraces the spectator within the heart of the temple. There is much truth in the popular Malayalam saying: "*Krishnanattam Kaanaan Kulikkanam, Kathakali Kandal Kulikkanam* (To see Krishnanattam, one needs to take a bath in order to purify oneself. But in Kathakali, one needs a bath after the performance, presumably to wash away its impurities)."

The popularity of Krishnanattam which had a lean period for some time is now on the increase. Instead of one, there are now two troupes. Traditionally performed in the premises of the Guruvayur temple, it is beginning to be recognised at the national level. The artistes have bagged the awards of the Sangeetha Natak Akademi.

The troupe was invited to perform in Europe in 1980. At the seventh Art Festival, Renne, Paris, it was given the pride of place on the performing stage. Krishnanattam was also presented at the Festival of India in the USA in 1985. There is also a documentary film on Krishnanattam made by the Films Division of the Government of India.

It is interesting to recall that for many years Krishnanattam was banned in the erstwhile States of Travancore and Cochin. Once when Kamsa vadham (the slaying of Kamsa) was being enacted, a real elephant was kept on the stage with a view to testing the divinity claimed for Krishnanattam. The animal represented Kamsa's Kuvalayapida which was set upon Krishna and Balarama. The two boys who enacted the roles of the divine heroes were terror-stricken at the sight of the huge tusker. Their Guru, however, blessed them, asked

them not to lose courage and urged them on to play their roles.

The boy who played Krishna plucked out the tusks of the elephant by the root alongwith the life of the animal as Lord Krishna Himself had done. It looked as though he would accomplish the next part of the drama - the slaying of Kamsa. The play was, therefore, stopped immediately.

As a booklet published by Guruvayur Devaswom puts it: "Krishnanattam harmoniously blends the Vaishnavite Krishna cult, the sense and style of Sanskrit theatre and the musical and poetic genius of Kerala into a very high sophisticated dance form that surpasses many others in the irresistible beauty and tranquility".

CHAPTER XI

NARAYANIYAM - THE GOSPEL OF GURUVAYUR

There are several *mahatmyas* (literally, works describing the greatness or importance of a place or deity etc.) legends and folk-tales extolling the glory of the Lord of Guruvayur. The *Narayaniyam*, which may be described as the Gospel of Guruvayur and which identifies Guruvayurappan with Mahavishnu, the central figure of the Bhagavata, is the greatest of these *mahatmyas*, creating a Guruvayur in the heart of everyone who reads or listens to it. To the lakhs of devotees who come here on pilgrimage all round the year the very name *Narayaniyam* is a source of spiritual sustenance.

The author of this great work is Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri, one of the foremost Sanskrit poets and savants of Kerala. He came of a Brahmin family of poets, philosophers, scholars and devotees. Though his exact date of birth is not known there is evidence to show that he was born at the beginning of the 16th century A.D. Some historians are of the view that he was born in A.D. 1559 or 1560.

The Bhattatiri family is now extinct but fortunately we have some details of Narayana Bhattatiri's place of birth, lineage, etc., from the following verse which occurs at the end of his famous work on grammar, *Prakriyasavvasvam*:

*Bhūkhāṇḍe Keralākhye saritamihā nilāmuttare ṇaiva
nāvā-*

*Kshetre gavyūtimātre punaruparinavagrāmanāmnī svad-
hāmnī*

*Dharmiṣṭhāt Bhaṭṭatiryād akhilamatapaṭormātṛdattad-
vijendrāt-*

*Jāto ṇārāyaṇākhyo niravahadatulām Devanārāyaṇāj-
nām*

From this it will be seen that the Meppattur (Uparinavagramam) *illam* was situated on the northern side of the Bharata river about two miles from the great temple of Tirunavay in Ponnani taluka of Kerala; that his father was Matridatta devoted to dharma and learned in *Bhatta Mimamsa* (Vedic ritualistic philosophy according to Kumarila Bhatta) and that he (Bhattatiri) composed this work (*Prakriyasarvasvam*) at the bidding of King Devanarayana.

Of his scholarship in various branches of learning and his teachers we have the following details in another verse:

*Mimāṃsādi svatātānnigamamavikalam Mād-
havācaryavaryāt*

*Tarkām Damodararyādapi padapadavīmcyutāryād Bud-
hendrāt*

*Teshām kārūṇyayogāt kathampi kavitāmāpnravam
karma caitat*

*Bhūyāt Kriṣṇārpaṇam me bhavatu ca satatam dhīra
dhāreh (kathāyām)*

He learnt the Vedas from Madhavacharya, logic from Damodara and grammar from Achyuta Pisharoti.

Of these teachers special mention must be made of Achyuta Pisharoti who lived at Trikandiyur, near modern Tirur. He was a celebrated grammarian of his times, an erudite scholar, poet, astrologer and above all a great bhakta. He became Bhattatiri's mentor, apart from his preceptor, following an incident in his early days.

Narayana Bhattatiri, though a child prodigy, led an erratic life in his youth. He grew up against the traditions of his family and caste without any proper education and study of the Vedas as enjoined on Brahmins. He ran away from home and led a wayward, dissolute life. For a while he lived at Trikandiyur where he lived on temple charity and carried on an affair with a girl belonging to the very family to which Achyuta Pisharoti belonged. One day, when Pisharoti was engaged in his devotions, he saw the young Bhattatiri stepping out of the house most irreverently. This provoked him to reprimand the young man. He asked Bhattatiri why a high-born like him should be wasting his precious life in sensual pleasures. This had the desired effect on Bhattatiri who turned over a new leaf. He took up the Brahmin's duties of prayer and religious practices and became a disciple of Pisharoti who initiated him into the rudiments of Sanskrit literature. Bhattatiri's latent genius blossomed in due course. Ere long he gained mastery over the Sanskrit classics, grammar, rhetoric, logic etc. He also studied the Vedas and became so learned as to gain the admiration of his master. From an irreverent sceptic in his teens he turned a great devotee of the Lord.

Bhattatiri took to writing and produced a number of devotional booklets and *prabandhas*. While he was thus emerging into fame, his preceptor Pisharoti was stricken with rheumatism. Bhattatiri, by way of *gurudakshina*, took upon himself by *avahana* (vicarious suffering) the disease from which his master was suffering. As a result Pisharoti was cured and his disciple contracted the fell disease. He tried every remedy known to man but in vain. At last he went to the Lord of Guruvayur, the Divine Healer, for refuge.

There he composed more than a thousand slokas (1,036 to be exact) in praise of Lord Guruvayurappan and recited them before the deity. The slokas, divided into a hundred dasakas (sets of ten verses), contain the essence of Srimad Bhagavata. They evoke the splendour of the ten Avatara Lilas (stories of Vishnu's incarnations), and almost every one of the one hundred dasakas ends with a prayer to the Lord of Guruvayur to cure the poet's malady. And cured he was by the grace of Guruvayurappan. With this the glory of Guruvayurappan - and also of Bhattatiri - spread far and wide.

Though apparently the aim of the *Narayaniyam* is the cure of the ills of the present birth, its hidden ultimate aim (like that of the Bhagavata on which it is based) is moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Thus the poet closes his last and hundredth *dasaka* praying to the Lord to bless him and likewise all those who recite this hymn with "*ayur-arogya-saukhyam*" - longevity, health and happiness here (in this world and now) and final deliverance thereafter.

Being an epitome of the Bhagavata purana, one derives the same benefit by reading it as the original

itself. Without any effort the reader is led step by step towards His presence till he exclaims with Bhattatiri, "*Agre Pasyami* (Him I see before me)", in the last *dasaka*. Here the poet gives an inspired and inspiring vision of Sri Krishna that was finally revealed to him, starting from the dazzling halo of lustre gradually culminating into that lovely, full-fledged divine form.

A point to note about *Narayaniyam* is that the entire poetical work is in the form of an address to Lord Guruvayurappan. It won the seal of approval of the Lord Himself. It is not to be regarded as a conventional *grantha* (book) but a divine nectar of the Lord's stories accepted (the assent being indicated by the nodding of the head) and set right by the Lord Himself with appropriate directions wherever necessary. There are many instances of such divine guidance to the poet during the course of this work some of which are recounted here.

To begin with, the inspiration for launching this immortal work itself came to Meppattur from those two lines from the *Bharatam* written by the great devotee and poet Thunjat Ramanujan Ezhuthachan:-

"Oh! Queen of Parrots! Thou art the garland mounted with crown, worn by she-parrots. Oh! Do tell me, Do tell me, the nectar of the divine *lilas* of Lord Krishna."

When Meppattur requested Ezhuthachan to suggest a remedy for his disease, the latter was so deeply immersed in the joy of chanting the divine names of Lord Hari that he said cryptically: "Begin with fish and eat it." The meaning of this strange advice was not lost upon Bhattatiri: he rightly understood it as an order to com-



Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiripad, a 16th century savant and poet who composed the immortal 'Narayaniyam'—the gospel of Guruvayur.
—from a traditional painting.



pose a poetical work on the Avataras of Vishnu beginning with that of Matsya (Fish).*

While dealing with the incarnation of Narasimha, Bhattatiri was at a loss to describe the shape of the man-lion form. It is said that the Lord then sprang up from one of the pillars of the *vatilmatam* as Narasimha and revealed himself to the poet.

Again, while telling the story of Rama, he was narrating the episode of Hanuman returning from Lanka after locating Sita and handing over to Rama her *chudamani* or hair ornament. He wrote '*Mauliratnam dadau*', ('gave the head ornament to') and then wondered to whom it was given. Of course he knew that the jewel was given to Rama but the poetic metre did not allow the extra word of 'Rama' which contains two syllables. He found himself lost in thought when Lord Guruvayurappan stretched his arm towards Meppattur indicating that the jewel was given to Lord Guruvayurappan Himself. The poet at once inserted the monosyllabic word, "*tey*" meaning "to you" and completed the stanza.

This incidentally shows that Rama and Guruvayurappan are one and the same. But wait...while describing the exile of Sita (she was then pregnant) in the forest Meppattur disapproves of the Lord's act, exclaiming "Alas! Siva! Siva! Thou didst such an injustice!" Thereupon Lord Guruvayurappan says: "It was done by Rama, not by me."

Now, coming to the story of Krishna Himself, Meppattur describes how Yasoda is annoyed with the Child

*"Lord Guruvayurappan and Narayaniyam Day", Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri Bhavan's Journal December 13, 1979.

Krishna breaking curd-pots and binds Him with a rope and fastens it around a mortar. In doing so Bhattatiri says that the curd-pot was broken by Krishna with the churning rod while in the Bhagavata the instrument used was given as a grinding stone. Meppattur realising the error was pained that he went against the authentic text of the Vyasa. But he was at once relieved when the Lord announced: "I did break the pot both with the churning stick and the grinding stone."

All these incidents show that while composing the verses, Meppattur felt the Lord's presence throughout. Indeed the *Narayaniyam* is Guruvayurappan speaking through Bhattatiri.

Now a word about the literary merit of *Narayaniyam*. It is considered one of the greatest Sanskrit works of Kerala, comparable to the *mahakavyas* of Kalidasa. Indeed it has all the features of a *mahakavya* or great poem — a clear-cut objective of ennobling the life of man, an elevated theme to achieve this, scope for expression of a variety of human sentiments and, above all, literary artistry. An adequate vocabulary, felicity and force of expression, modulation of style according to the theme or situation, use of words that echo the sense, figures of speech are some of the elements of literary craftsmanship that constitute a truly great *kavya*.

To a literary critic the *Narayaniyam* will be found satisfactory from all these points of view. It has for its objective the liberation of man, the most significant of all *purusharthas* (aims of life). Its theme and subject matter are Srimad Bhagavata *purana* whose eighteen thousand verses are epitomised and recast as a hymn of praise in one thousand thirty-six verses. The theme, especially the

life of Sri Krishna which forms fifty-two of the one hundred *dasakas* of the work, gives adequate scope for the expression of human sentiments like the heroic, the erotic, the terrible, the sublime, the pathetic, etc.

But the one sentiment that permeates the work is bhakti. An undercurrent of sincere devotion of an ardent aspiring soul flows throughout the poem, which never fails to captivate the reader. A sense of pathos, not of poetic imagination, but born of the "lived experience" of the poet also percolates, whether visibly or invisibly, through the verses of this text, and mixing with its evident devotional sentiment, generates the emotional behind which gives the *Narayaniyam* its peculiar charm.*

The young Bhattatiri, crippled by a disease and reduced to a state of utter helplessness, takes refuge at the feet of the Lord as a suppliant. To begin with, he bemoans his fate, which finds expression in the verses of the first three *dasakas*. Then he feels there is no point in wasting his time bewailing his lot and loses himself in singing the praises of the Lord. Thus, subsequently, in verse after verse he shows that his only object in praying for relief from pain was that he might afterwards devote all his mental energies without any distraction to the practice of wholehearted devotion to the Lord. Indeed he pleads with the Lord in the following verse to make him a devotee mad with divine love, going about the world like Suka and Narada preaching the message of bhakti.

*Itthamabhyasananirbharollasattvatparatmasukha
kalpitotsavah*

* *Narayaniyam*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda, and published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

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kalpitotsavah*

* *Narayaniyam*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda, and published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

*Muktabhaktakulamaulitam gatah sancarema
sukanaradadivat*

Even the apparently worldly Rasalila became the noblest and highest communion with God when seen through the perspective of our devotee par excellence, when he describes the same as follows:

*Ganamisa viratam kramena kila
vadyamēlanamuparatam*

*Brahmasammadarasakulah sadasi kevalam
nanrturanganah*

*Navidannapi ca nivikam kimapi kuntalimapi ca kan-
culim*

*Jyotisamapi kadambakam divi vilambitam
kimaparam bruve*

It is not only the glories of several incarnations of the Supreme contained in the Bhagavata that are summarised in the *Narayaniyam*; it also embodies the spiritual teachings like those given by Kapila to his mother Devahuti (third canto of the *purana*) and by Sri Krishna to Uddhava (eleventh canto). The eleventh canto, particularly, which contains the cream of spiritual teachings has been briefly summarised in this treatise in the short compass of 64 slokas beginning with *dasaka* 91. The essential points have been gleaned from the *purana* and a practical philosophy has been evolved and presented in magnificent verses, easily comprehensible to common aspirants.

Herein the poet elucidates the charming path of bhakti or devotional love, which, according to him, is the easiest means to achieve the goal of life. The other two paths viz. *karma* (action) and *jnana* (knowledge) are not easily accessible to the ordinary mind and as such, does not appeal to him.

The gist of his teachings, like of those of Adi Sankara, is this: "God is omnipresent. He pervades all. To love Him you must love all. To see Him you must see all in Him. You exult in Him and consequently you cannot hate anybody as He is in all. You realise oneness in diversity. A true devotee sees the Supreme in the individual soul. His is *Parabhakti* or higher devotion. It is this recognition of the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme that elevates mankind, enlarges its vision and ennobles its thoughts and deeds." It is this gospel that Bhattatiri proclaims in his masterpiece, *Narayaniyam*.

Indeed few works of poetry excel the *Narayaniyam* in kindling in the heart of its reader that fervent devotion to the Lord and guiding him in his daily duties! No wonder the work holds a high place in our religious literature and appeals to a wide circle and commands great popularity among the devotees of Sri Krishna especially in the South where it is on the lips of many thousands.

And just as in the case of Bhattatiri himself his rheumatism began to subside as he began his work, even today when doctors and medicines fail, the recital of the *Narayaniyam* is a remedy for incurable diseases as well as a means of attaining salvation.

The expression "*Ayur-arogya-saukhyam*" with which the *Narayaniyam* concludes has a special significance

other than its literal meaning, "Longevity, health and happiness." It is a code word indicating the date of composition of this work, i.e. 27,12,200th day of Kaliyuga according to Indian astronomical calculations. Converted into Christian era this Kali day would give November 27, 1587 (Vrischika 28, 762 - Malayalam era).* According to some, the Kali day referred to is 1712210 corresponding to December 7, 1586.**

From the above calculations, it would appear that Bhattatiri composed the *Narayaniyam* in his 27th year (as the date of his birth is 1559 or 1560). After being restored to health he passed his days as a saintly devotee. But he also took time off to compose several other works like *Dhatukavya*, *Silpiratna*, *Apaniniyapramana*, besides *prabhandas*. He completed his highly eulogized *Prakriyasarvasvam* referred to earlier, in 1617, at the age of fifty seven. Thereafter he started his *mimamsa* work called *Manameyodaya* (proofs and categories). While he wrote the first part *Mana*, he did not live to complete the second part *Meyodaya*; it was done by another scholar named Narayana in 1655. Thus it is assumed that Bhattatiri passed away several years before 1655. Since there are proofs to indicate that he was present at the death-bed of his master Achyuta Pisharoti in 1624, historians place his own demise in 1625. The theory that he lived up to the age of 106 is thus not supported by evidence.

Bhattatiri and Poontanam:

For all the erudition you see in his *Narayaniyam*, Meppattur did, however, make some mistakes in his work and learnt a bitter lesson of his life.

* *Narayaniyam* by P.N. Menon

** *A short history of Kerala* by Prof. K.V. Krishna Ayyar

In contrast with him there was Poontanam Nambudiri, a humble devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. He had no formal education. In his daily *parayana* of the Bhagavatam or of chanting of the thousand names of the Lord he mispronounced many words. Once Bhattatiri laughed when he heard him utter the word Amaraprabhu (Lord of the Devas) as "Maraprabhu" (in Malayalam it would mean Lord of the trees). An incorporeal voice was now heard saying: "The Lord is Amaraprabhu, Maraprabhu and indeed Sarvaprabhu (Lord of everything)."

Still the proud Bhattatiri would not learn the lesson of humility. Poontanam wrote a Malayalam lyric in praise of the Lord. Called *Jnanappana* or Song of Wisdom, the work is noted for its simplicity, force of diction and devotional fervour. Being however diffident, he wanted Bhattatiri to go through it and have his blessings.

But Bhattatiri had no patience with a book written in mere Malayalam (then considered vernacular). In contempt, he said to Poontanam that he had better study *vibhakti* (declension) first since God did not hearken to anything but Sanskrit! Poor Poontanam was crestfallen and cursed himself for not mastering Sanskrit. He went home and wept bitterly before Guruvayurappan for not being able to sing his glory in Sanskrit. The Lord was moved by his heart-rending prayer. He took the form of a Brahmachari and proceeded to Bhattatiri's house the same night. Bhattatiri had just returned from the temple and was preparing himself to recite his own glorious piece, *Narayaniyam*, when he saw the stranger. He could at once sense something divine in the boy and after greeting him offered him a seat by his side as he recited '*Narayaniyam*', beginning with "*Sandranandava...*" The

boy was quick to point out a mistake in the very first verse and explained the fault to the startled Bhattatiri, by referring him to the *Kavyaparakasa*.

Bhattatiri admitted his mistake. But when he had recited the second verse, lo, two mistakes were pointed out by the visitor. The proud Bhattatiri lost his nerve and began to perspire as he resumed his recitation. In the third verse there were three mistakes, four in the fourth and so on...After the tenth sloka Bhattatiri's eyes opened. He realised the Lord in the boy who had told him that Poontanam's bhakti (devotion) was more pleasing to Him than Bhattatiri's *vibhakti* (meaning grammar or erudition).

Bhattatiri rushed up to Poontanam and, falling at his feet, begged for his forgiveness. He sought a copy of *Jnanappana* with a view to correcting its mistakes. But when he read it, he found it flawless, to his utter surprise. He even incorporated one or two ideas from the book in his own *magnum opus*.

Thus the Lord made Bhattatiri cast off the ego that still tainted his soul and showed the world that bhakti alone is the path of salvation and not *vibhakti*.

There is one more incident in Bhattatiri's life to show that whenever a bhakta's mind is tinged with pride, the Lord, out of His infinite mercy, sees that it is erased. Once Meppattur went to the well-known Mookkola temple to worship the goddess there. It was some years after he had composed his *Narayaniyam* and he was a little proud in having been able to produce a masterly

summary of Bhagavata. An *apadachudam** description of the Mookkola Goddess was thus child's play for him and this he began to do. But even after composing full seventy stanzas he found that he had not progressed far from describing the divine feet and that he could proceed no further. It was then that he realised that he could by himself accomplish little and that whatever he had achieved was due to God's blessings alone.

His pride thus vanquished, he remained at Mookkola for many days praying to the goddess. One day a celestial vehicle appeared. And within moments it ascended into the skies carrying Meppattur to Vaikuntha. Even today devotees worship the sacred spot whence Meppattur made his departure to the heavens.

The day on which Meppattur dedicated his *Narayaniyam* to Sri Guruvayurappan i.e. the 28th of Vrischikam (November-December) is celebrated as "*Narayaniya Dinam*," every year at Guruvayur.

CHAPTER XII

OTHER GURUVAYUR SAINTS

Poontanam Nambudiri (1547-1640)* referred to in the previous chapter was not only a great mystic but also a great Malayalam poet. A contemporary of Meppattur, he hailed from Angadipuram, about 56 km. from Guruvayur. Poontanam was not his personal name but that of his wife's family, of which he became a member after his marriage at the age of 20.

In contrast with Meppattur, Poontanam was not even conversant with the Vedas. In fact he had no formal education while Meppattur was taught by the most learned teachers of the day. Poontanam's knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre and his devotional outpourings were all in Malayalam. On the other hand Meppattur held Malayalam in contempt and his contributions were all in Sanskrit.

As Prof. Krishna Ayyar writes: "Poontanam was an embodiment of devotion, pure and simple; he was a saint of the masses and his appeal was to the heart. Meppattur evoked the admiration of the learned and aristocratic few; his appeal was to the head."

Poontanam became a staunch devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan following an incident which completely changed his life. He was blessed with a child after years

*A Short history of Kerala by Shri K.V.Krishna Ayyar.

of supplication at Guruvayur. But it died on the *an-naprasana* day - a tragedy which left a deep wound in his mind. In 1586 he came to Guruvayur determined to recover his lost child as in the story of *Kumaraharana* which he had rendered into Malayalam.

Gradually, however, Unnikrishna (the child Krishna) took the place of his son in his heart. Wisdom dawned upon him and he asked: "With Little Krishna dancing in our hearts, why need we little ones of our own?" (*Unnikrishnan manassil kalikumbol, unnikal mattu venamo makkalai?*)

This is from his *Jnanappana* or Song of Wisdom which is one of the most moving works of poetry, simple and profound at the same time. To quote Krishna Ayyar again: "Forged in the furnace of the heart there is not a single word in it that does not have the true metallic ring." Some of the lines taken from this work translated into English illustrates this:

*"We are not born together;**
Neither do we die together;
When we meet in between them
Why should always quarrel we?"
"Sitting on the throne of wealth,
who is thinking of his might
Next is seen in poverty-
This is done by Almighty"
"Beggar leading wretched days
Becomes a king by His Grace!"

* Poontanam - A Vaishnava Poet by V. Krishnan Nambudiri, Kalyana Kalpataru - March 1962.

*"Day by day we near our end;
Desires grow more in our mind!"*

Poontanam's other compositions are *Sri Krishna Karnamritam*, *Santanagopalam*, *Kuchelavrittam* and *Subhadraharanam*.

He spent the last fifty-four years of his life in Tinkal-Bhajanam or monthly worship at Guruvayur. He read the Bhagavata every day and exhorted people to do so and repeat the Bhagavan's name constantly as the only way to salvation." Repeat the Divine name, said he, "and filled with the love of the Lord dance and dance like one who is mad."

*Of the numberless Holy Names,
One only one, once only once, every day
While taking rest or dreaming
In joke or scorn of another,
Even for others, not for oneself
While in temple or closet be,
If uttered with one's own tongue,
Or heard only with one's own ears
Once, only once, morn or eve
Life's purpose fulfilled it is;
The soul becomes one with Brahman,
So with heart full of joy, utter ye the Holy Name,
And filled with bliss, become one with Brahman.*

(Jnanappana)

There are many incidents in the life of this mystic revealing how he experienced God's grace. The one relating to Meppattur has been narrated in the previous chapter.

One day after reading about *Rasa Krida* in the Bhagavata he left a book mark at the end of the chapter. When he opened the book the next day he found the mark at the beginning of the chapter. So that day also he read it taking care to keep the mark at the end of the chapter. But he was surprised to see the mark again at the beginning of the chapter the third day. He again read the chapter. That night he had a vision. Krishna of Vrindavan appeared before him and said: "It was I who put the mark at the beginning of the *Rasa Krida* chapter repeatedly because I wanted to hear you read again and again." From next day onwards Poontanam made it a point to recite the chapter daily.

On another occasion he had started later than usual for his *Tinkal* from his native place. The route from Angadipuram to Guruvayur then lay across a forest infested with robbers. The sun had already set and Poontanam found he had still six miles to go to reach Guruvayur.

On the perilous path he sought courage from chanting of the Lord's name and singing from the *Narayaniyam*. Nevertheless he was waylaid by robbers. The only valuable thing on him was the ring he wore on his finger. This the ruffians removed by force and beat him up. Poor Poontanam fell on his feet giving himself up to the Lord's - his beloved Guruvayurappan's - care. In a flash he saw Draupadi praying to Lord Krishna to save her from the wicked Dussasana disrobing her in the

open assembly of the Kauravas. He saw Gajendra offering flowers at His feet to save him from the jaws of the crocodile and Poontanam also found himself praying:

*Ya tvarā Draupadītrāṇe yā tvarā Gajarakshaṇe
mayyārte karuṇāmūrte sā tvārākva gatā hare!*

And rescued he was! How? As he was praying to Guruvayurappan, the sound of a galloping horse was heard and there appeared on the scene a party of the Zamorin's soldiers, commanded by Mangat Achan. Seeing this, the robbers took to their heels leaving the ring and Poontanam fell at his saviour's feet. As a token of gratitude he offered the commander the ring, which he reluctantly accepted.

Next morning when Poontanam went to have his beloved Lord's darshan at Guruvayur, the *Melsanti* handed over to him a ring which was the same as he had handed over the previous night to the Zamorin's commander. The mystery became clear to Poontanam in no time. The commander was none other than the Lord Guruvayurappan Himself come to save His poor devotee's life. Tears of grateful joy rolled down Poontanam's cheeks as he fell prostrate before the Lord.

When Poontanam became too old to visit Guruvayur Bhagavan appeared before him and advised him to perform his devotions in his own *Illam*. Poontanam did so. When the time came for him to depart a *vimana* appeared in front of his house and in it he was transported to heaven.

Poontanam's place in Malayalam literature and his importance in the religious history of Kerala cannot be exaggerated. As a writer of simple Malayalam he stands next only to Cherusseri Sankaran Nampiti whose *Krish-nagatha* proved to what sublime heights Malayalam could soar without the admixture of Sanskrit. Kunjan Nambiar, the famous Malayalam satirist was indebted to Poontanam for his language, if not for his ideas.

And the object of Poontanam's writings too, like those of Cherusseri, was religious — to turn people's mind from worldly pleasures to seek salvation. His philosophy of life as expounded in his poems is that instead of wasting our time and energy in petty quarrels and jealousies we should devote ourselves to the service of God - reciting His names and doing his worship.

Indeed, it was he, like the Nayanars and Alwars, who emancipated religion from the shackles of ritual and made it a living force.

Vilvamangalam and Kururamma:

Vilvamangalam II (1575-1660) and Kururamma (1570-1640) who were cousins were two blessed souls who had visions of the Lord. Kururamma was born in the village of Parur, near the house of Vilvamangalam. Her maiden name was Dhatri; she became Kururamma or the lady of the Kurur family in Adatty in Trichur by marriage.

"See - Him - we - must" is the only song of hers that has so far been discovered. Like Poontanam's poems it is full of devotion and an expression of her passion for the divine vision. And see Him she did.

Indeed to the childless Kururamma, the Lord served as her son. She lived with Him, played with Him and even scolded Him when He became naughty. The boy in turn helped the lady in her household chores and did her every service that a son would for her mother.

It is to Poontanam and Kururamma that we owe the conception of the Lord of Guruvayur as Unnikrishna or Balakrishna (child Krishna) though all formal worship is offered to Him as the all-pervading Mahavishnu. The popularity of nama japa in Kerala is also due to them.

Vilvamangalam II was born in the same family as Vilvamangalam I (1251 to 1350). He became a sanyasin and like Vilvamangalam I he became the head of Thekke Matham at Trichur. He was associated with every important temple in Kerala. He considered himself Guruvayurappan's greatest favourite and could see Him whenever and in whatever form he wished to see Him.

Though Vilvamangalam was a sanyasin, there still remained in him a degree of egoism. The Lord's partiality for Kururamma and her passion for namajapa or repetition of the holy name baffled him. There are many stories to show how the Lord cured him of his pride and how He was really partial to his cousin who, with her unstinted devotion, not only worshipped the Lord but also His bhaktas.

Vilvamangalam used to have the vision of the Lord in all His glory every day at the end of his worship. One day the Lord appeared before him later than usual. He was found smeared all over with grime. Questioned by Vilvamangalam on this Krishna explained that He had

been held up by Mother (Kururamma) who had covered Him with a kuntli (water pot) since He had been up to some mischief. He pointed to the soot on his body as proof.

On another occasion, Kururamma who held Vilvamangalam in high esteem invited him for *bhiksha* (for alms). With the help of Unnikrishnan Himself, - that was what she called the Lord - she prepared an elaborate meal for the august visitor and was eagerly awaiting his arrival. She waited the whole day and the night, without taking any food herself, but the sanyasin did not come. As for Vilvamangalam he forgot all about his engagement since he was engrossed in the worship of the Lord. It was when his beloved Krishna did not appear before him next morning when he went about crying for Him that he heard an incorporeal voice reminding him how he had caused agony to Kururamma by disappointing her the previous day. He hurried to her house full of remorse and made ample amends by accepting her hospitality.

On another occasion, an old Brahmin, suffering from acute stomach-ache, approached Vilvamangalam for a remedy. In a moment of impatience, Vilvamangalam sent him away with the curt words: "This is due to your past *karma*. Expiate the same by suffering; there is no other way." On his way back the disappointed brahmin was accosted by an old woman who, seeing his hungry look offered him food. The Brahmin, suffering as he was from stomach-ache, ate the sumptuous meal hesitantly. But, lo! from the very moment he took the first morsel he was cured of his stomach ailment and he became hale and hearty. The woman who offered him hospitality was none other than Kururamma. Vilvamangalam who heard

about this later was once again repentant and was purged of his pride.

Manavedan:

Another great devotee who was very much attached to Guruvayur temple was Prince (afterwards Zamorin) Manavedan (1595-1658), author of Krishnanattam. He was the disciple of Vilvamangalam II. As a result of his devotion, reinforced by his Guru's blessings, the Lord is said to have vouchsafed the prince a vision of Himself, as a little boy playing in the temple premises.

His innate devotion and the profound influence exerted on him by Vilvamangalam and the author of *Narayaniyam* provided him with selected incidents to present the story of Sri Krishna in a series of dramas. This is described under the Chapter on Krishnanattam.

The palace records of the Zamorin show that Manavedan reigned from 1655 to 1658. Contemporary literary works indicate that over and above his poetic genius and profound scholarship he was also a farsighted and able ruler. He passed away at Trichur on February 15, 1658, and cremated there or at the Zamorin's place at Guruvayur.

His remains are enshrined in the Zamorin's palace at Guruvayur as evidenced by the stone slab on the southern side. A lamp is lighted here daily at sunset befitting the saintliness of the deceased. And every year after the Krishnanattam performances are staged in the temple, they are staged in the palace also as a mark of homage to the author.

*The Story of Manjula and a Garland**

To be born in Guruvayur and to grow up under the fostering care of the Lord, breathing His breath, sharing His food and ever attending on Him, there cannot be a more sublime existence on earth. This was the rare fortune that came to the Variyar girl, Manjula. She was in every sense a product of the hallowed soil of Guruvayur.

Manjula was born in a family whose traditional profession was to gather flowers and make garlands for Sri Guruvayurappan. These duties were religiously done by her devout mother and while her hands made the garlands, her lips moved in repeating the Lord's Names. She also took every opportunity to sit and listen to the stories of Bhagavatham being expounded by the great Meppattur.

Such seeds of good life were sown in Manjula at the very birth and with her mother's milk, she also imbibed an abiding attachment to Sri Guruvayurappan. As the days and months passed with every step and every event, Manjula came closer and closer to the Lord. Her first rice-feeding ceremony took place in His presence. And since then not a day passed without her being taken to the Temple for darshan and the discerning eye of the mother could see a steadily growing intimacy between the babe in her arms and the Infant Krishna who dominates stage in Guruvayur.

*Edited version of *Guruvayur - The Vrindavan of Today*, by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, translated by T.K. Narayanan. Note: The piece was handed over to the author by Namacharya a few days before his demise!

The atmosphere at home was as congenial to the growth of Manjula as that of the temple. Manjula rose every morning with Ezhuthachan's *Hari Nama Kirtan* ringing in her ears, and the lines of Poontanam's *Jnanapana* served as lullaby to send her to sleep each night. When she was three to four years old she could recite from memory the melodious verses of *Krishna Karnam-ritham*.

All her ornaments at about this time were offered to Sri Guruvayurappan. It was perhaps the most joyous and proud moment of her life. From now on, she began visiting the temple by herself and often sat in rapt attention to the inspiring discourses of Mappattur. Whichever the subject, Mappattur invariably returned to his main theme that it is the greatest good fortune of the world that the Supreme Lord shines in all His Immanent glory in Guruvayur.

For hours, Manjula could be seen standing before the Lord, often exchanging glances and greetings with Him. Evidently, a heart in the inner sanctuary of the Guruvayur Temple, was beating in unison with hers. Manjula was just five years old. Bala Gopala - the Infant Krishna of Vrindavan - was her idol and she had no difficulty in recognising the same idol in the Guruvayur shrine.

It was the same with the Gopa Kumaris of Vrindavan.

In token of her attachment to the Lord, Manjula stringed with her own hands some of the choicest flowers into a comely garland and made a present of it every day to Sri Guruvayurappan. It was not only a part of her hereditary occupation, but also a labour of love to

her. As each day dawned, this continued to be her first act; it was only afterwards she thought of herself and touched any food.

Then one day, quite early in the morning, Manjula with her mother had unavoidably to leave Guruvayur for another place. They had hoped to be back by noon puja, when Manjula could offer the garland of the day to the Lord. But as things turned out they could return only by night. With the garland hurriedly made, Manjula made a dash to the temple and found to her dismay the doors closed after night puja. It was too much for her to bear and she instantly dropped on the ground almost unconscious. The temple servants and a few Bhaktas rushed to the spot and in reviving her, tried to console the inconsolable girl.

Meppattur pleaded with her that she could offer the next day two garlands to Sri Guruvayurappan and thus make up for the day's lapse. On the other hand, Poon-tanam pointed to the sacred peepul tree dear to the Lord, at the extreme end of the eastern nada and a stone image at the foot of it which could be taken representative of Sri Guruvayurappan, especially in this piquant emergency. Somehow this last suggestion appealed to Manjula and she sped to that spot and herself lovingly adorned the Image with her garland.

Next morning, as usual, to the blowing of conches, the ringing of temple bells and the rising crescendo of Hari Nama Kirtanam as of the days of Vrindavan, the doors of the Guruvayur Srikoil reopened exactly at 3 a.m. and Guruvayurappan in His transcendental glory

emerged in view, the cynosure of all eyes, the focus of all attention and the Idol of all hearts! Of course, Manjula was present among the devotees, doubly eager, that morning to have Nirmalya darshan of the Lord.

The *Melsanti* now had to prepare the deity for oil bath and Vaka charthu after the manner of Yasoda of Ambadi. As a preliminary, he stripped the idol of all ornaments, garlands and other adornments including the sandal paste all over and lifting the til oil silver vessel in his hands, he was about to anoint the Lord with the oil, when behold! a garland of flowers was seen round the neck of the idol.

The *Melsanti* stood a moment visibly surprised and then thought that it might have been due to an oversight on his part and carefully removed the garland. Making sure the idol was now absolutely naked, he made a second attempt at oil abishekam which proved again abortive, for an identical garland had just re-appeared on the idol! The process was repeated about half a dozen times with the same result each time! The garland kept on materialising turn by turn. It looked as if the idol was producing flower garlands one after the other. The *Melsanti* got unnerved and coming out of the Sri Koil, he confided his baffling experience to the persons who gathered around him. And as the story spread, the wonder grew.

Meppattur recalled the occasion when Sri Guruvayurappan played a more or less similar game before. It was when Dussasana stooped to disrobe Panchali in public and in the anguish of her heart, she made a frantic call to Sri Krishna and wonder of wonders! her sari assumed the length of the Lord's mercy and the

human hands of Dussasana confessed defeat and withdrew.

Poontanam, however, was immediately reminded of the previous day's garland incident of Manjula and in a flash, the key to the mystery came to him. Manjula's garland should be removed from the stone image at the root of the peepul tree and the mystery would solve itself. This was done, the phenomenon of garland duplication thereupon ceased and the abhisekams and pujas proceeded as usual.

All that Manjula, the simple girl of five, possessed to her credit was a loving heart. And indeed, Guruvayurappan sought and cared for nothing else.

Manjula's garland on that particular day came too late; moreover, it was offered by proxy and yet the Lord accepted it, not only as the usual one, but by His mercy multiplied it into several.

Not a word has been said, or heard of Manjula after this episode. Hence she remains in our memory as the girl of five years.

That peepul tree is still alive; it is the first to greet Bhaktas who approach the Guruvayur temple from the east. And the tree ever since the Manjula miracle has been known as Manjula in sacred memory of the girl of the perpetual age of five! (The word 'al' after Manjula being the Malayalam for peepul.

CHAPTER XIII

MINSTRELS OF DIVINE GLORY.

Nowhere in India is the Bhagavata discourse given so much importance as in Guruvayur. Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi once indicated in an article on temple worship that to Sri Guruvayurappan nothing is more pleasing than the recitation of the Bhagavata; this explains why Bhagavata sapaha yajna, seven-day discourse on Bhagavata, is often conducted at Guruvayur. Recital of the *Narayaniyam* which is Bhagavata in nutshell is also conducted regularly at the temple as also Bhagavat Gita.

Conducting mass Narayana japa with large number of devotees participating is another feature of the temple. Guruvayur has produced several preachers of divine glory, verily transporting the listeners to a blissful firmament of devotion where one forgets the cares and sorrows of the every day world and is attuned to the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

Among the names of such scholar-devotees that readily come to mind is the late Kudallur Kunjikkavu Nambudiri (1839-1903)*. He was the second son of Vasudevan Nambudiri, who was often referred to as Vasudeva Sastrigal because of his proficiency in the

*The History of Guruvayur, Prof. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, Guruvayur Devaswom.

sastras. Kunjikkavu became familiar with the Puranas through his mother's daily parayana of Tunjath Ezhuthachan's works. He learnt Sanskrit from his father who wanted him to become a second 'Suka' in Bhagavata exposition.

Indeed Kunjikkavu began his discourse when only 28 and his fame began to spread. He became known for his deep scholarship, power of exposition, marshalling his arguments. The particular spot in Guruvayur temple where he used to sit for his discourse came to be known as 'Kunjikkavu's Corner'.

Like Poontanam and Kururamma, Kunjikkavu also preached the efficacy of namajapa as the easiest way to salvation. A jivanmukta like Poontanam, he saw God in everything, animate and inanimate alike. He was seen circumambulating the animals, asses and dogs and prostrating before them and acknowledging them as living manifestations of the Supreme Brahman and identifying them with the Lord inside the temple.

He was also known to enter even the sanctum sanctorum at times and take away from there whatever he wanted, causing embarrassment to the management and devotees alike, but every one took it as a prank. In fact, Kunjikkavu himself used to give away whatever he had, to anyone who asked for it. One day he was seen coming out of the temple without his upper garment which he had given away to a needy devotee. On the way, he found a beggar stretching out his hand. As Kunjikkavu had nothing to give, he gave away the *mundu* he was wearing. Seeing him walking along the street with a loin-cloth, one of his friends quickly brought him another *mundu* which he wore.

Kunjikkavu was specially devoted to his tutelary deity of his illam, Mookkola Bhagavati. The shrine was badly in need of repairs and Kunjikkavu pleaded with his elder brother who managed the family property to provide money for the purpose. But the latter did not heed. Disgusted, Kunjikkavu left the illam vowing that he would not return till the temple is repaired.

The elder brother who had no male issue consulted astrologers. He was advised to make peace with his estranged brother, which he did. Kunjikkavu came back and attended to the repairs of the shrine. While taking leave of his brother, he said: "By the grace of the Lord of Guruvayur, the next child in this illam will be a son and you should offer the Lord the baby's weight in butter at the time of his *annaprasanam*". Needless to say, this came true!

Bhaktasiromani

As Prof. K.V. Krishna Ayyar would often say: "The Guruvayur Lord gives His devotees not only what they ask — generally long life, health and happiness but also sometimes even more". To Bhaktasiromani Vazhakkunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri (1891-1947), Bhagavan gave a rich heiress in marriage and a pension (by the Cochin Raja) which he had not even dreamed.

Born in Vazhakkunnam illam, Vasudevan Nambudiri began his devotional life at Sukhapuram, dedicated to Siva or Dakshinamoorthi. He obtained siddha-perfection in the five-lettered Saiva mantra, Na-mas-si-va-ya. Strangely he prayed not for mukhti but for winning the first prize of a Rs15 lakh lottery. But his ticket did not draw even a pie and he began to rail against God and the mantra.

Soon Vazhakkunnam had an attack of rheumatism of a severe type. As Ayurveda and allopathy treatment proved ineffective, he turned to *Narayaniyam*, reciting it every day, as many times as possible. Gradually his health began to improve and in due course he was completely cured. He thus became a staunch devotee, of Guruvayurappan and shifted his residence to Guruvayur, the fountain-head of the divine nectar. He lived there for four years reciting Bhagavata and *Narayaniyam* in the temple for his own benefit and that of the people. Indeed the Lord gave him good health, a good wife who happened to be an heiress and wealth too.

Vazhakkunnam dedicated the rest of his life to the pursuit of religious enlightenment and the awakening of the Hindu society. He went about addressing the village folks and students in schools and colleges, thus taking religious discourses out of the temple to public platform.

In recognition of his devotion and social service, the Cochin Raja conferred upon him the title of Bhaktasiromani and a monthly honorarium of Rs. 20 in 1946. He now undertook the stupendous task of writing a Malayalam commentary for the Sanskrit Bhagavata. Unfortunately he could not complete it as he received the Lord's summons to Vaikuntha while he was writing the ninety first chapter.

*Neelakanta Sadguru (1898-1945)**

It is said of Bhakta Prahlada that he became beloved of Sri Hari because Sage Narada spoke to him through

*Sri Guruvayurappan Thirunama Mahatmyam, Sree Guruvayurappan Sankeerthana Trust.

the ears of his mother even when he was in her womb. Mekkad Neelakanta Sadguru was in his mother's womb when Kunjikkavu gave her sanctified ghee which was what endeared him to Guruvayurappan and made him leave his native village Parakkad near Angadippuram and settle in Guruvayur.

The Lord often chooses His devotees as messengers at different times. If Meppathur came to Guruvayur seeking cure for his rheumatism, the immediate cause that led Neelakanta guru to resort to Guruvayur was a stomach ailment. But once there, he made it his life's mission to serve the Lord and the devotees through Bhagavata and Namasankirtan.

By then he had become a great scholar and was even honoured with Pattatanam at Tali temple in Kozhikode in recognition of his learning.

Sadguru had started popularising the efficacy of namajapa first among the simple Nambudiri womenfolk who were traditionally confined to their homes. In due course it became a mass movement conducive to the welfare of the community.

It was Sadguru who introduced Nama saptaha yajna (seven-day chanting of Holy name) for the first time. Except for short breaks during temple rituals like *Seeveli* etc, the routine lasting seven hours a day consisted chanting of "Narayana" interspersed with short discourses on the greatness of the Name and inspiring bhajans. From April 1940 Nama saptaha was held every month in *kuttambalam*. Within a year requests poured in from individuals and organisations for similar yajnas to be conducted at homes and other places. Thus the movement

spread wings and Nama yajnas were conducted at diverse places like Tripunithura and Tiruvilwamala.

In 1942 when horrors of the Second World War gripped the country, with foodgrains and other essential commodities becoming scarce and people fleeing cities because of atom bomb scare, every one turned to the Almighty God for help and protection. Even the government issued directions to people to offer prayers at all places of worship for peace and welfare. Kongot Ramankutty Nair was then the Devaswom Manager of Guruvayur temple and a great devotee. He called a conference of like minded bhaktas and a few other leaders at Guruvayur. At this meeting Neelakanta Guru declared with firm conviction that the welfare of the world could be ensured by mass chanting of Narayana in front of Guruvayurappan.

Thus mass Namajapa lasting 41 days commenced on 26 December 1942 under the leadership of Sadguru. The japa started after the morning *Siveli* and lasted till the evening *Diparadhana*. The prayer was not for the victory of the allies or for the defeat of the enemies - it was the universal prayer, *Lokha Samasthah sukino bhavantu*.

It is noteworthy that the movement gave an impetus to the bhakti cult through Namasankirtan and since then Namajapa is held for half hour every evening and became part of the daily ritual at Guruvayur.

There were several instances of devotees getting cured of dreaded diseases through the 'medicine' of Harinam during Sadguru's time. The great scholar and Bhagavata exponent Polpakkara Nambudiripad developed a diabetic carbuncle. Ashta Vaidyas and al-

lopathic doctors alike opined that he would not live beyond 90 days.

However, Nilakanta guru along with several devotees prayed to Guruvayurappan that the ailing Nambudiripad be blessed with "ayur arogya saukhyam". He also organised a group of devotees and started namajapa sitting near the patient for two hours daily. In three and half months, the number of "namams" chanted totalled seven and half crores. Then the miracle happened. The coconut-size tumour burst by itself one day. With constant nursing and namajapa the wound was completely healed within six months and Nambudiripad was himself again, hale and hearty.

Dr. Balakrishna Nedungadi of Madras who had seen service as a Major in the army, was the poor man's doctor in the true spirit of "manava seva being Madhava seva". A few years ago he was afflicted with paralysis and was virtually immobile below the waist. Treatment under Ayurvedic and allopathic systems, having failed to cure him, he resorted to Akhanda namajapa, continuous chanting, for 24 hours, at his residence, Kesari Kuteeram, in Madras.

The very next day the doctor's legs acquired some strength. He had a dream in which Guruvayurappan appeared, Himself pushing a wheel chair with the patient seated thereon. The Lord commanded that when the patient himself was able to walk again, he should visit Guruvayur and surrender the wheel chair there. Lo! within a few days the doctor was enabled to do this!

Sadguru himself was suffering from tuberculoses. In deference to the entreaties of his numerous disciples he

submitted himself to medical treatment while his tongue incessantly chanted Lord's names. In fact, there was no need to go in search of a doctor. Hearing the Guru's ailment, the Civil Surgeon of Chavakkad hospital, on his own, came to treat him. He was none other than Dr. E.T. Vargheese who had great faith in the Guru and Guruvayurappan. Every morning he went round the temple tank, stood near the East nada *dipasthambham* and had darshan of Bhagavan.

Hearing that Sadguru was seriously ill he went to his residence and prescribed the necessary treatment. Thereafter he visited him daily. He partook of the Lord's prasadam, *palpayasam*, offered by devotees there and felt singularly blessed by Guruvayurappan and shed tears of joy. Indeed strange are the ways of God who wanted to bless this strange devotee, a non-Hindu, in this manner!

It was the second day of the annual utsavam of February 24, 1945. Amidst loud chanting of Hare Guruvayurappa, Narayana, Sri Neelakanta Sadguru shed his mortal coil and attained the Lord.

Devotees could only pray with Poontanam:

Gurunathan tuna cheika santatam

Tirunaamangal naavimmel eppozhum

piriyate irrikkannam nammute

narajanmam saphala maakkituvaan.

(May Gurunathan be always with us, may Lord's names be always on our tongues, without a moment's break, so that we could fulfil the purpose of taking this human birth).

*Anjam and the Divine Name**

In direct succession to great teachers like Neelakanta Guru came Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri (1918–1988) who lived and worked for the Divine Name. The daily half hour mass recital of Narayana at dusk started by Sadguru continued after his death under the late Anjam's auspices for four decades and is now being conducted by his devoted brother Anjam Krishnan Nambudiri.

Indeed, if Sadguru lighted the lamp of devotion in many a Kerala home, it was Namacharya Anjam who not only kept the lamp burning but also took it to other parts of our land. He flew to cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta "on the wings of the Lord's mercy" and held vast audiences spell bound by his inimitable discourses on Bhagavata and the glory of Namasankirtan.

A man of absolute humility, Anjam often declared that his only qualification was that he belonged to Guruvayur and to the Lotus Feet of its presiding deity. To everyone, from presidents and prime ministers down to common devotees no visit to Guruvayur was considered complete without a visit to Narayanalayam, Anjam's ashram.

Anjam had no regular schooling, yet he was a scholar in Sanskrit and Malayalam. Author of several books, editor of "*Sri Guruvayurappan*" magazine, till his death and founder of Sree Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust, bhakti was the breath of his life and the burden of all his discourses. His seven-day Bhagavata discourses were a veritable treat.

*Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri (T.K. Narayanan) *Bhavan's Journal* (November 28, 1971)

Whether they were held in Guruvayur or in big cities crowds thronged to hear him and their experience was one of rejuvenation of the mind and a lifting of the soul. He had the great gift of summoning in a moment the atmosphere of Guruvayur and impregnating his audience with it.

Anjam was on a conquering mission—conquest of the hearts of the devotees for his all-in-all Lord. He was a messenger par excellence of Sri Guruvayurappan, carrying the gospel of hope and cheer and spreading good will among men in a distracted and distressed world.

Yet he was a non-believer till the age of 20 when he reluctantly went to Guruvayur with his uncle who was then the head priest of the temple. He was then suffering from a chronic stomach complaint. After taking the Lord's prasadam for a few days his stomach ailment vanished, and convinced of divine presence at Guruvayur he stayed on there to become a great bhakta of the deity.

Anjam's is the strange story of an atheist turning theist. He came to scoff but remained to pray. He grew up to boyhood at the time when the Nambudiri youth were on the path of revolt against restrictions that bound their community to lead a simple and austere life. Under the impact of modern ideas and western education however these irksome restrictions broke and young men like Anjam went about parading the new fads, lisping new slogans and flaunting disbelief in religion and the everything old.

But once in Guruvayur, which he visited mainly to please his *melsanti* uncle, he extended his stay and a gradual change came over him. Thanks to the liberal

helping of Lord's prasadam - the puddings and other sweet offerings - his disease, far from getting aggravated, was actually relaxing its hold. Whereas previously his stomach could not absorb even a morsel of select food, now it seemed to hold anything and everything. In spite of himself his hands came together in obeisance to the Lord and his lips began to mumble Lord's names.

Thus Anjuam made Guruvayur his permanent home. There has been no evening in Guruvayur without the half-hour namajapa at dusk. He was never tired of dinning into our ears that "Name is inseparable from Form" "Each divine name epitomises and enshrines a leela of the Lord. Constant recitation thus enthrones the Lord permanently in your mind".

Anjam is no more, but his stentorian voice can still be heard: "Hold on to Namasankirtan - it takes you straight to the Lord. He is the ocean of mercy and love to his devotees, far more than a father, mother or relative".

One of his oft-quoted Malayalam slokas was:

Narayana ennu sada japichaal

papam ketum, pasi ketum, vysanangal teerum

naavinnu unarcha varum, ettavum antyakale

Govinda paada Kamalangal telinju kanum,

(By chanting Narayana always, one's sins get destroyed, hunger and sorrows vanish, tongue acquires vigour and above all, at the end of one's life, the lotus feet of Govinda will manifest themselves).

"Kasi Appan Thampuran"

There are several Bhagavathotamas whose inspiring accounts could be included here if only space would permit. However, among them all, Kasi Appan Thampuran stands out. He was a senior member of the erstwhile Cochin royal family, highly educated, with a degree in Engineering from the prestigious Benares Hindu University. He was holding a lucrative post in Calcutta and possessed robust health. In short he had everything one could wish for in life. Yet he felt great dejection, a state of unhappiness and want of peace in himself. So he renounced everything and repaired to holy Kasi.

For the next ten years he made Kasi his home. He undertook pilgrimages to Badrinath, Mathura, Dwaraka and other holy places. At Dwaraka, while he stood praying to the Lord, he heard a voice saying: "Rama, you need not marry, I am always with you". (His real name was Rama Varma Appan Thampuran) Like this, Thampuran experienced the presence of God several times.

Those who are endowed with the qualities of renunciation, knowledge and devotion perceive the Lord in their hearts and in fellow-beings. Thampuran was full of compassion for the poor and destitute. When they lay shivering on the banks of the Ganga, on wintry nights, he carried bundles of woollen blankets on his shoulders and covered them unobtrusively.

Thampuran left Kasi and spent nearly 25 years at Guruvayur. On occasions he visited Tripunithura, his native place, especially to tend his aged parents when they fell sick during their last moments. His aim was to complete chanting 30 crore of Narayana and achieve life's

purpose. He far surpassed this target. Every month he did one Bhagavata saptaha.

His heart went out for the poor, who in 1942, due to scarcity of foodgrains virtually starved. He organised free kanji for them by spending his own money and collecting donations from others. This is being continued even today, 13 years after his death on August 16, 1979.

Like Poontanam, Thampuran was virtually awaiting to be taken to Lord's feet. A few days before his end came, he distributed everything he had to the poor including his own bed which he gave away to his maid servant. He did not suffer from any illness nor was bed-ridden even for a day. Chanting Guruvayurappa, Narayana, which even his neighbours could hear, he passed away around the time the sanctum sanctorum was being opened for *nirmalya* darshan that Ekadasi day - the *anaayaasena maranam*, an end that is peaceful, which only the blessed could aspire.

Bhaktotama Parameswaran Embrandiri

If Tampuran was born into a rich family, Parameswaran Embrandiri was a poor Brahmana, who left his home in Karnataka at the age of 13 and had gone about holy places from the Himalaya to Rameswaram in search of God. Following the Vedic path of negative 'neti' 'neti' (not this, not this) which the searcher adopted to approach Brahman, he at last came to Guruvayur. After few days of bhajan, the poor devotee, who had nothing except the *mundu* he was wearing, found in Guruvayurappan - what he had been searching during all those years of travel. He decided to spend his remaining years in the service of the Lord of Lords and His devotees.

During the 43 years he spent in Guruvayur, the *nirmalaya* darshan of the Lord without Embrandri was the one no July 3, 1982 when he passed away. He was a regular fixture in the temple from *nirmalayam* to *trip-puka* rain or shine. He spent a few hours in the night sleeping under the gopuram or on the steps of the shops. One day, Kalati Narayana Iyer, a staunch devotee, moved by the sight, requested him to sleep in his house, which Embrandri did.

As days passed, Embrandiri was seen joining in the Bhagavata discourses and in the Narayana japa conducted by Mekkad Nilakanta Sadguru. He completed recital of namajapa three and half crores times and Bhagavata parayana 108 times. When he came in close contact with Kasi Appan Tampuran, he shifted his residence to his house. A great organiser that he was, he helped Thampuran in the distribution of free kanji to the poor. He continued this philanthropic act even after Thampuran's death.

It was Embrandiri who built the asbestos shed in front of the eastern gopuram to provide shelter to the poor. He knew well how these helpless suffered as he himself had been one such when he came to Guruvayur. It was built at a cost of Rs.13,500 under the able supervision of the then Superintending Engineer at Palghat, Sri Thottakad Balakrishna Menon who declined to accept any remuneration offered by Embrandiri.

On another occasion, Embrandiri offered the costly *Udayasthamana* puja to the Lord. How did Embrandiri get money for all these expenses? He offered to conduct *vazhivadus* for devotees for which he received *dakshina*, which he did not use for his material needs, but saved.

It was Embrandiri who undertook the responsibility of conducting the namajapa at dusk. He had such organising capacity that once Appan Thampuran said that if at all he became the ruler of Cochin he would make Embrandiri the chief minister.

Embrandiri loved children to whom he distributed bananas after the Namajapa.

Embrandiri never left Guruvayur once he settled there. Once when he was advised to go to Coimbatore for treatment at the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy there for his urine trouble, he agreed but asked: "What about the darshan of Guruvayurappan?" Like the heart-broken gopis of Brindavan, he could not live even for a moment without seeing Guruvayurappan.

On the night of July 2, 1982 Embrandiri called his companion at 12.45 and told him that he wanted to go to toilet. He washed himself and changed into new clothes. Then he stretched himself on his bed and lay flat, uttering 'Narayana', 'Narayana'. After a few moments he was silent.

Anantharama Dikshitar

The glory of the Lord of Guruvayur was propagated during this century by two illustrious personalities. One was the saint and scholar, the late Upanyasa Chakravarti, Sengalipuram Anantharama Dikshitar through his inimitable Upanyasams (discourses) and the other, the mighty Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar through his divine music.

Dikshitar was cured of his leprosy by praying to Sri Guruvayurappan. When Dikshitar visited Guruvayur for

the first time some 45 years ago, his disease was in such an advanced stage that he had to cover his entire body. The watchman at the temple tank did not allow him to take his bath. Three or four years later, it was a different Dikshitar who came to pray before the deity to the amazement of everyone. The miracle was wrought by the fervent recitation of *Narayaniyam*.

Later, through his learned commentary on this immortal work and his popular religious discourses, Dikshitar did much to spread the glory of Guruvayurappan. Whether the discourse was on the Ramayana, or the Mahabharata or the Bhagavata, he would eventually lead his listeners' minds to Lord Guruvayurappan. Today if hundreds of thousands of devotees from the neighbouring states of Kerala, nay, from distant corners of India, flock to Guruvayur seeking the infinite mercy of the Lord, it is in no small measure due to the inspiring talks given by Dikshitar. If Narayana Bhattatiri composed *Narayaniyam*, it was scholar saints like Dikshitar who spread the message of surrender to the Lord, among millions of people.

Some years ago, during one of his discourses in Madras, a devotee from Guruvayur reminded Dikshitar that the stock of rice meant for the daily *naivedyam* at the temple was fast dwindling. The Upanyasa Chakravarti was greatly concerned and told the audience that neglect of the needs of the Lord of Guruvayur would spell disaster for the world and appealed to them to come forward with contributions. Thanks to his plea, the Tamil Nadu government soon sanctioned the rice required for Guruvayur.

Chembai, Saint Thyagaraja reborn

Another beneficiary of Guruvayurappan's grace was the late Sri Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, one of the greatest musicians in recent times. Some years ago he lost his voice and regained it by His Grace. Here is an account by Chembai himself:

"On January 7, 1952, I was giving a concert at holy Suchindram. An hour had elapsed and I was at the peak of my performance. All of a sudden, my vocal chords got stuck up, as it were, and my voice totally failed me. The concert broke up in confusion. Many rushed up to the dais to render help. Doctors tried their best with pills and potions but to no avail.

"I went through life without any hope and no ray of hope seemed to come anywhere,

"In this state of desperation, in 1954, on the great Ekadasi Day in Guruvayur, I stood before the Lord and wrung out my heart to Him. I could not give vocal utterance to my anguish. Memories of the glorious days when I had sung His praises surged forward.

"O Lord, I cried out, will Thou not let me sing Thy praises? Will Thou let my heart break for without this outward expression of my heart's agony. I can hardly live? Hadst Thou in the past not given the gift of speech to the great Muka Kavi? Had he not sung Thy praises in enchanting Sanskrit verses known so well as the Muka Panchasati Stotras?

"In my agony and mute supplication to the Lord, I had not noticed a Nambudiri standing at a distance of

some fifty feet from me. He divined my trouble and came to me. He had evidently heard my inarticulate prayer. He promised to rid me of my trouble, Guruvayurappan willing.

"The Lord had sent his minister to help me and I regained my voice. In keeping with my promise I have since then been singing the praises of Bhagavan. Every year, I have the *Udayastamana* puja performed at the temple of Guruvayur and the sum of Rs.5,000 needed for it comes from the concerts that Guruvayurappan himself arranges."

Despite the infirmities of old age from which he suffered Sri Chembai was indeed blessed - for he gave recitals till the day he breathed his last - October 16, 1974.

On September 7, the same year, on his 81st birthday, he had completed his 41st *Udayastamana* puja at Guruvayur.

Right from the age of 20, Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar had been visiting Guruvayur almost every year for the Ekadasi Festival there and giving concerts which were attended by a large number of devotees. The last recital he gave there on such an occasion was a year before his death and it was the sixtieth in the series - a rare and fortunate distinction for a bhakta. Chembai also encouraged other vidwans to come to the temple, give concerts and be the recipients of the Lord's blessings.

Like the great composers Muttuswami Dikshitar and Thyagaraja, Chembai too had a premonition of his end.

During his last visit to Guruvayur, i.e. on September 7, 1974, he cried out to the deity: "Guruvayurappa, the death anniversary of my mother is nearing. With this unwieldy burden of my body, withered by age, how can I perform the sraddha with the customary baths and other rituals? Take me to Thy feet soon, please."

That evening his concert, the very last before Guruvayurappan, was most inspired and inspiring. He rose to such a crescendo of emotion and bhakti that it seemed as though the Lord and his devotee were conversing with each other.

And Bhagavan, in his infinite mercy, did heed Chembai's earnest prayers. Within a few weeks, in another temple of Sri Krishna, after an excellent performance when he also sang as usual the famous "Agrepasyami..." (I behold Thee in front of me), Chembai who had shown no apparent illness till then died and departed for his Maker's abode.

And with this, he proved that he was not just a good musician; not just a good man; not just a good devotee but that his was a dedicated, evolved and divine soul destined to shine in the firmament of history, alongwith other glorious stars like Thyagaraja, Dikshitar and Sastri.

Chembai was presented a plaque conferring on him the title Abhinava Thyagabrahman on Dasami Vilakku day in 1974. This was the last musical function of Chembai inside the Guruvayur temple.

CHAPTER XIV

GAJARAJAN KESAVAN*

It was the time of the historic Malabar Mutiny. The Valia Raja of Nilambur with his family had evacuated to Thrissur, leaving his extensive property to the mercy of the Lord. He prayed to Lord Guruvayurappan that he would offer one of his 12 elephants to the Lord if his property was saved from the mutineers. When the mutinee was over he got back his whole property intact and true to his oath, he dedicated one of his elephants to the temple, which later became the famous Gajarajan Kesavan.

Kesavan was then ten years old. When he arrived in Guruvayur, Padmanabhan was at the height of his glory. And young Kesavan imbibed all the noble and kingly qualities of Padmanabhan. Indeed in nobility, Kesavan even excelled Padmanabhan though he had some peculiar characteristics. He would bend his front-legs only before those who held the Lord's *thidambu* to enable them to climb upon him. All others who held umbrella, *alavattom* etc. were to climb by his hind-legs. He never tolerated anybody trying to break this practice.

Kesavan was not free from mischiefs and mad antics when he came to Guruvayur, so much so, he was called the 'lunatic Kesavan'. As a cure for this he was given

*Guruvayur, *The Bhooloka Vaikuntha*, Guruvayur Devaswom Publication.

butter, made holy by *Melsanti*, which is considered an effective treatment for stupidity. He was also made to perform bhajan by attending all the three *sivelis*. With all these, he grew to be an ideal elephant.

One noble trait of his was that he never caused any bodily harm to anyone. Even if he became wild when outside Guruvayur, without spoiling anything on the way, he would straightaway proceed to Guruvayur, go round the temple and stand where he usually would be chained.

There are numerous stories dealing with the astounding incidents in the life of this great elephant. One such story reveals his extreme compassion for people in distress. Once he was walking hurriedly to the temple through a narrow lane, disobeying the orders of the mahouts. Horrified, the people on the road and those inside the shops on both sides of the road ran for their lives. But a leper who had lost both the legs, sitting on the middle of the road, could do nothing but cry aloud for the mercy of the Lord. Every one feared that Kesavan would cause the poor man's instant death by trampling over him. But as everyone watched the scene from a safe distance, Kesavan lifted the man with his heavy trunk, gently placed him in a corner and then went straight to the temple.

For the first time in history, the Golden Jubilee of the services of an elephant to the temple was celebrated at Guruvayur in 1973. On that occasion, the title of honour "Gajarajan" was awarded to Kesavan. However, on the famous Guruvayur Ekadasi day on December 2, 1976, something unusual happened to him. As soon as the *Thidambu* was placed on his head, Kesavan started



The celebrated Kesavan, the temple elephant, who was awarded the title of honour, *Gajarjan*, King of Elephants. He served Lord Guruvayurappan for fifty-three years by carrying His *thidambu* during processions. He breathed his last in front of the deity on Ekadasi day in 1976.



shivering terribly and within a few minutes became completely upset, unable to hold himself on his legs.

The *Thidambu* was soon changed to another elephant and Kesavan was slowly led to the Kovilakam compound near the temple. There he lay with his trunk stretched towards the Lord, never to raise again.

Kesavan was 72 years old when he died. Kerala's biggest elephant then, he stood 3.2 metres tall and had participated in every ceremony at the temple for 54 years. No one who had seen him will forget him. He was not as well proportioned as his predecessors, Padmanabhan or his namesake, Kirangat Kesavan was. But there was a stately dignity about his gaunt frame. For more than fifty years he had served no master but the Lord of Guruvayur.

As a fitting memorial to Kesavan, a 12 feet high concrete statue of the elephant has been erected by the Devaswom at the spot in front of the Panchajanyam Rest House — a living testimonial to the great affection with which he was held by devotees during his time. The Rs.1 lakh statue was sculptored by noted artist M.R.D. Dathan. It was he who did a life size statue of Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiripad that has been installed in Meppattur's birth place at Thirunavai.

While Kesavan became a part of the Guruvayur legend, there have been other elephants too which by their marvellously magnificent appearance or by their immaculate conduct, endeared themselves to the devotees during their life time. One such elephant, as mentioned

earlier, was Guruvayur Padmanabhan. The extent of love and admiration of devotees that these elephants commanded are testified by the fact that Padmanabhan was honoured with a Veerashringhala (golden chain awarded in recognition of glory) by the then Maharaja of Ambalapuzha.

Padmanabhan was offered to Guruvayur by Cheru Kunnath Nambudiri. The story goes that this Nambudiri had no children and he was spending his tearful days lamenting over his sad plight. Then Kunjikkavu Nambudiri, an ardent devotee of Guruvayurappan and Bhagavata exponent, advised him that the Lord would bless him with children if he offered Him an elephant. Accordingly, Cherukunnath Nambudiri came to Guruvayur and performed Bhajan. In due course his prayers were answered and he offered the elephant, called Padmanabhan.

When Padmanabhan was brought to Guruvayur there were only one or two elephants here. As the Cherukunnath illam swelled with more and more children, the number of elephants at Guruvayur also increased with the coming of Padmanabhan. He himself grew through the years to be the most prominent of all elephants in Kerala with ever so many astonishing incidents in his life.

The Devaswom and the people of Guruvayur also honoured the tallest she-elephant of Kerala, Lakshmikutty. Though not equal to her two illustrious predecessors - Padmanabhan and Kesavan - in physical appearance or turn-out, in nobility and devotion to duty she had few peers.

The amorous advances made by Lakshmi to the majestic Kesavan are well-known but their concealed love never came to fruition because of the impediments imposed by their human custodians.

Since Lakshmi towered over all other elephants, she had the privilege many times to carry the *Thidambu* on her head. March 4, 1983 was a memorable day for Lakshmi for it was on this day that she was presented with the title "Gajarani" at a glittering function held at the temple.

The playful Krishna of Guruvayur has collected over forty elephants, mostly donated by affluent devotees, which is a unique phenomenon. No other temple in Kerala, and for that matter throughout India, has so many elephants as Guruvayur. It is to the credit of the *devaswom* that these elephants are fed and looked after by a large number of mahouts on the temple payroll.

CHAPTER XV

LILAS OF LORD GURUVAYURAPPAN

The glory of Guruvayurappan has spread far and wide as a deity who answers the prayers of his devotees. The Lord said to Arjuna in the Gita: "I am responsible for the welfare of those who think of me to the exclusion of all else and who remain devoted to me all the time." Thus it is that Lord Guruvayurappan comes to the rescue of his bhaktas in distress and manifests His grace in infinite and inscrutable ways. Recounted here are incidents that should lift the hearts of the sick, the depressed and the helpless.

The Lord as Divine Healer:

The story of King Janamejaya being cured of leprosy has been narrated in detail in Chapter II. This and the legend of the Pandyan ruler narrated in the Chapter, "Temple Architecture" illustrate the popular belief that by the grace of this deity the sick and the afflicted are restored to health and happiness.

The context in which the famous *Narayaniyam* came to be written and how the author Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri was completely cured of his ailment has also been narrated in Chapter XI.

There was another Nambudiri, a staunch devotee, who was suffering from acute paralysis. He had become

such a cripple that he had to be carried always in an *uri*, the network suspended from a beam or rafter to hold curd-pots and other domestic utensils. Hence he came to be called *uriyamatham*, his *matham* or dwelling place virtually being an *uri*. After the doctors had given up all hope he vowed a substantial offering to the Lord of Guruvayur if he were cured. And thus he came to Guruvayur for bhajan, with his purse bulging with its contents meant for the offering.

At the same time another man had come to Guruvayur. He was abjectly poor and hoped he could gain prosperity by propitiating the deity. One day Uriyamatham went to the Rudratirtha for his morning ablutions. Placing the purse on the topmost step he caused himself to be lowered into the water for a dip. The poor man in search of wealth happened to be by the tank. He saw Uriyamatham's purse and wasted no time in swooping down on it. And within moments he was off with his booty. Uriyamatham who saw the theft leapt out of his *Uri* and, clearing three or four steps a bound, gave chase to the thief, without realising how miraculously he had been cured. Just then he heard an incorporeal voice saying: "Be content; thy prayers are granted; so also his!"

One Kunhianujathi Tampuratti of the Zamorin's family was brought to Guruvayur in 1890. She was past eighty and was suffering from rheumatism. She had been confined to bed for many years as a hopeless case. As a last resort she was brought to Guruvayur. Everyday, early in the morning, her attendants would dip her in the Rudratirtha and carry her round the temple on the shoulders. On the tenth day, she is said to have walked by herself, doing the circumambulation without any help.

A sannyasin called Taikkad Swamiyar was a victim of scrofula. His devotion to the Lord took the form of serving his devotees. In fact he had a dream that he should daily help in serving food offered to the Brahmins in the temple. He did this and observed bhajan for a few months as a result of which he was cured of his disease. The eastern Vilakkumatam or gallery of little lamps, outside the Nalambalam, which no visitor to Guruvayur can miss, is his grateful offering to the Divine Healer.

Even in this modern age when medical science is so much advanced the number of devotees who get cured of their bodily ills by the grace of Lord Guruvayurappan is legion.

The Lord and the little Priest

Once, a little Nambudiri boy from Nenmeni *Illam*, had to officiate as the temple priest in place of his father who had gone to a friend's house to attend a sraddha ceremony. The boy in all his innocence believed that the deity would actually partake of the *naivedyam* offered merely as a ritual. He placed the cooked rice before the Lord and when He did not touch it in spite of all his entreaties, and even threats, he thought the Lord was averse to eating the *naivedyam* without butter-milk and mango pickles. So he brought these from a neighbouring *illam* and placed them before the Lord. As the Lord still did not respond physically to the invitation, the boy said, sobbing, that his father would punish him, if the *naivedyam* was found untouched by Him. The Lord now relented and ate the entire *naivedyam*.

With great joy, the little priest placed the empty vessel before the Variyar attendant to have it cleaned. The

latter whose perquisite it was to have the entire *naivedyam* flared up at the boy thinking that he had eaten all of it. He waited for the boy's father to return and complained to him about his son. The father went into a rage and raised his hand to slap the son when an incorporeal voice was heard from the *Srikoil*: "The boy is innocent; I am the guilty one; not the unni (boy)"

How the Lord saved His Devotees:

Once a doctor and his wife went by train to Guruvayur via Trichur to fulfil a vow. When they got down at Trichur it was too late and they missed the last bus to Guruvayur. But they were so eager to have the early morning darshan that they hired a cart to Guruvayur.

After they had gone half way up, the driver drove them to an isolated place and stopped the cart. Soon the cartman was joined by others who demanded the jewels and the cash the couple were carrying. Just then a taxi appeared as if from nowhere with its blinding headlights. The ruffians ran away and the taximan drove with the couple to Guruvayur. The grateful doctor presented the taxi driver with a valuable ring in appreciation of the timely help. Next day they took their bath and went for the morning darshan. Imagine their surprise when they found the ring they had given to the taximan at the feet of Lord Guruvayurappan.

Coconut with horns:

Once a farmer who had planted coconut palms offered the first crop to Lord Guruvayurappan. As the trees started yielding fruit, true to his promise, the farmer

packed the nuts in jute bags and carted them to Guruvayur. On the way, a band of robbers set upon him and tried to snatch away the bags. When the farmer pleaded that they were meant for Lord Guruvayurappan the robbers retorted: "What is there special about it, if they belong to Guruvayurappan? Do they grow horns?"

So saying they lifted the bags from the cart and scattered the contents on the road. To their consternation and surprise they found that the coconuts indeed did have horns! Needless to say they let the farmer continue his journey to Guruvayur with the coconuts.

The Lord as Soldier:

A young man, Sankaran, suffered many hardships. He went from place to place in search of a job and eventually became a cook for a family in Coimbatore. During the three years he spent there he happened to visit Guruvayur with a householder. This proved a turning point in the life of Sankaran, who was till then a non-believer. He began chanting the Lord's name and reciting the *Narayaniyam* regularly. Later he enrolled himself in the Army. Guruvayurappan was his sole refuge wherever he was posted and in whatever capacity he worked.

Early in 1962, he was posted as a Signaller at an Indian outpost near Manasarovar. He was enchanted by the beauty and grandeur of the sacred place. In November that year, when the Chinese army laid siege to the area, Sankaran found himself separated from all his colleagues. His supplies ran out and had not even a drop of water to drink. In the extreme cold he lay almost frozen and unconscious, but his lips mumbled "Guruvayurap-

pa!", "Narayana!". It seemed the Lord responded to his prayers. Three Indian jawans appeared from nowhere, lifted him up and fed him with hot porridge. Refreshed, he woke up and followed them. As they reached safely, the three men disappeared.

Sankaran wondered at the mercy of the Lord who came in the guise of the soldiers to save him. He then remembered the Malayalam verse of Tunchan, the poet philosopher of Kerala:

"Hari jagnnathan paran Narayanan

arikel undallo tunayayi eppozhum."

(When everyone abandons you there is Hari, the Lord of the Universe, and Narayana always by your side).

How repetition of Lord's name saved the devotees:

As mentioned earlier, Mallisseri was one of the trustees of the temple. One day a certain devotee had wanted a feast to be held for the Lord with a hundred measures of rice. In Guruvayur the offering intended for the Lord is to be prepared by the two *Kizhusantis* or assistant priests. Unfortunately on the day one of them was on leave. Mallisseri was wondering how he would arrange the feast. He spent a sleepless night thinking it over and praying to the Lord to help him out of the predicament. "Thou alone art my refuge, no other!" he cried out.

At day-break he went to the temple with halting steps. He looked around and saw to his joy that the *Kizhusanti* who had been on leave had returned and preparations were going on for the feast. By ten O'clock

it was all ready and the *Kizhusanti* went to the Rudratirtha for a dip. But he did not return to receive the extra remuneration he was entitled to. The amount was therefore credited to the "Private account of the Lord." As the *Kizhusanti* did not turn up the next day also, Mallisseri sent his men to look for him. He was traced to his own illam where he had been confined to bed ever since he had been on leave. Mallisseri could not but conclude that the Lord himself had come as the *Kizhusanti* in answer to his prayers and helped him out of the difficulty.

The Lord her refuge:

A mother and her children spent many sleepless nights as some legal proceedings were pending against her. The evidence and arguments were well matched and both sides were represented by equally able advocates. But there was every possibility of the court passing orders against her. Her only refuge lay in the Lord. And she appealed to Him by repeating His sacred name some fifteen lakhs of times; in other words, she had made fifteen lakhs of calls on Him to help her. Small wonder, the court's orders turned out to be in her favour.*

The Lord alone could help

A creditor purchased his debtor's house in a court auction. If he insisted on his right to take possession of the house the debtor and his family would be in the streets. In utter despair the debtor sought the advice of a friend of his. All that the latter could do was to tell him that the Lord alone could help. For seven days and nights the debtor and his wife prayed to Lord Guruvayurappan.

*This and the following six incidents have been adapted from *Glory of Guruvayur* by K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *Kalyanakalpataru*, October 1964.

On the eighth day he went to the creditor. The doors were closed and no one seemed to be around. In despair he beat his chest exclaiming: "O Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?" Right then the doors opened. The creditor came out and gave a sympathetic hearing to what he had to say. The result: he agreed to forgo his right to take possession of the house.

The Lord ensures safe delivery:

How a wife's confinement was postponed to an auspicious month is another proof of the Lord's unfailing grace. The woman in question was to have had her confinement in the month of Dhanus (December-January) which is considered inauspicious in Kerala. The woman and her husband were very much worried over the matter and consulted a friend. He advised them to keep their trust on Guruvayurappan. He also wrote out a mantra invoking the Lord. Thanks to their prayers, the confinement took place on the sixth day of the following month i.e. Makara, (latter half of January).

In another case the Lord's help was sought in making a safe child birth. It happened in 1960. The mother who was six months pregnant had been advised by a leading obstetrician of Bombay that since hers was a difficult case her confinement should take place in a well equipped maternity hospital. Subsequently, as is the custom, she went to her native place for confinement. There their family doctor who was also a well-known obstetrician made arrangements for her delivery in a reputed hospital. But the lady was still anxious and on the advice of a friend turned to Guruvayurappan for help. She kept on writing the sacred name 'Narayana' until it became physically impossible for her to do so.

When the labour pains started it was night and there was a thunder-storm. None of her relatives could stir out to fetch the family doctor. It was not till morning that a messenger could be sent to him. But the doctor was not at home; he had gone to Guruvayur! Nevertheless, by the grace of Lord Guruvayurappan, the delivery took place at home itself and it was safe and normal, with only a mid-wife to assist.

The Lord comes to Doctor's aid:

One night a Coimbatore doctor gave wrong pills to a patient from a nearby village suffering from stomach-ache. It was too late when he realised to his horror that the pills contained enough poison to kill the patient. Messengers were sent in search of the patient but without success. The doctor was in jitters — for three days and nights he prayed to Guruvayurappan. On the fourth day the villager presented himself before the doctor to report that the very first pill had cured him.

Yet another instance of Bhagavan's grace has been narrated by this doctor. While in his teens he used to go to Guruvayur every day for the *nirmalya* darshan. When he came out after the worship, he would give some flowers and sandalpaste to a leper sitting outside. One day the leper was not to be seen. Five years passed and the doctor saw him again at Guruvayur. But there was not a trace of the fell disease on his body. The one time leper explained that one day, while at Guruvayur, he seemed to hear a voice asking him to go to Vaikom. Believing it to be the Lord's command he proceeded there and performed bhajan and was eventually cured. He was thus twice blessed, by Guruvayurappan and Vaikathap-

pan (Lord Siva of Vaikom). He believed that it was the prasadam of Guruvayurappan which he used to receive at the doctor's hands that brought about the miracle.

The dumb becomes eloquent:

Vedambal, daughter of Siva Iyer, was living in Delhi with her parents. In 1961, having passed her S.S.C. examination, she was hopeful of a bright future when all of a sudden a bout of typhoid left her mute. Many ENT specialists were consulted but they could do nothing.

Firm in the belief that Guruvayurappan would not forsake them, the girl and her parents decided to undertake a 41-day bhajan. They arrived at Guruvayur early in June the same year and began their worship.

One day, a bhakta advised the girl to practise namajapa in her mind and listen to the Bhagavata discourse. This she religiously did. She was not in a fit condition to take the customary early morning bath and accompany her parents to the temple for the *nirmalya* darshan. She would however get up with them, wash her face and legs, light a lamp before a picture of Guruvayurappan and mentally chant the Lord's name and various stotras.

On June 26, the family woke up as usual and the parents prepared themselves to go to the temple. Suddenly they heard Vedambal utter, "Narayana," "Narayana." She soon got up and told the awe-stricken parents, "I am also coming to the temple."

Mukam karoti vacalam

Pangum Langhayate girim

Yatkrpa tamaham vande

Paramanandamadhavam

[I salute that Madhava, the Source of Supreme Bliss whose grace makes the dumb eloquent and the cripple cross the mountains.]

The efficacy of nama japa is illustrated by another incident which took place some 25 years ago. The son of a Pattukaran of Guruvayur participated in the daily nama japa conducted there, even as a lad. In course of time he became a steadfast devotee of the Lord. One day as a college student, he was escorting his sister from Ettumanoor (near Kottayam) to Guruvayur. Part of the journey was covered by boat through the backwaters. It was midnight and the weather was stormy. The boat suddenly developed trouble and was about to sink. The occupants cried in panic but the boy and his sister constantly chanted the Lord's names.

Finally, as the boat was going down, they felt some one pulling them out of a window and throwing them in the water. Then they became unconscious. Hours later, when they came to their senses they were safe on the shore. The people who had collected told them the story of how all other passengers had been drowned and they alone had been rescued by a fisherman.

The very night the boy saw the Lord telling him in a dream: "It was I who came as a fisherman and rescued you." The boy then realised the truth of what Krishna had said in the Bhagavata:

Hari smrtih sarvavipadvimoksanam

[Those who remember the Lord Hari – Guruvayurappan – will be saved from all kinds of danger.]

How the Lord helped the poor:

There was a poor but contented woman who was a steadfast devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. She was unhappy that she had nothing to offer Lord except her '*tali*' or '*mangalasutra*'. For a woman there is nothing more inauspicious than removing the *tali* even if it is to be given away to the Lord. But she did so as her love of Guruvayurappan transcended every other consideration. But as she left the temple she found her *tali* intact around her neck. She returned, placed it again in front of the deity and left. To her surprise she found the *tali* again on her neck. Thinking that the Lord was not satisfied with her meagre offering she returned to Him for the third time and cried out saying that besides her mangalasutra she had only her heart to offer to the Lord. Just then a voice was heard from inside that the Lord was pleased with her whole-hearted devotion and she could take back her *tali*. As she returned home she found, like Kuchela, that she had been blessed with unexpected wealth.

An old Nambudiri woman used to visit Guruvayur on the first day of every month. Once she was laid up with swollen legs and so could not walk from her village to the temple. Nor had she the money to travel by bus. Even if she could somehow reach Guruvayur she had no means to make the *trimadhuram* offering."

Lamenting her fate to her friend who usually accompanied her to Guruvayur, she went to bed that night

chanting the name of the Lord. But those who cannot live even for a moment without the Lord's darshan or without uttering His name, are blessed by Him. The old woman found in her dream Guruvayurappan appearing before her and consoling her with these words: "You can as usual visit Guruvayur tomorrow morning. You will find the bus fare of ten annas in your money bag.

As for the *Trimadhuram* I am more fond of hearing "Narayana" from my bhaktas than their offering."

The old lady was overjoyed at the mercy of the bhaktavatsala that the Lord is. She carried out His behest the next morning. She took a bus right from her door step, arrived at Guruvayur without any difficulty and worshipped Bhagavan as usual, the swelling and pain having disappeared.

All that she asked of Guruvayurappan was to grant her the strength to utter His name constantly. As the Bhagavata proclaims:

Kimalabhyam bhagavati prasanne Sriniketane

["If the Lord of Lakshmi blesses what cannot be gotten?"]

It would be interesting to read the personal accounts of the devotees who have experienced Sri Guruvayurappan's grace and living presence. They constitute neither legends nor folklore, but are incidents that happened to them. Says K. Govinda Varrier:

On January 1, 1969, my fifteen-month-old child suddenly fell ill. At first I did not take it seriously but as the hours passed his condition gave me cause for anxiety. He was admitted to the Cochin Naval Base Hospital in an unconscious state. In a few days he regained consciousness but lost his eyesight. he was kept in the hospital till February 18. Since there was no improvement, the Doctors advised me to take the child to C.M.C. Hospital Vellore. I did so.

At Vellore he was treated from March 3 to March 17, but again with no success. I became heart-broken. "Is the child condemned to live his whole life without seeing his parents and the world and also without hearing a sound?" I lamented.

"In my helplessness I turned to Guruvayurappan and prayed to Him from the depths of my heart. I vowed that I would observe a 12-day bhajan at Guruvayur, the moment the child got better. One day, while I was engaged in my daily prayer, a friend brought a hakim. The hakim examined the child and said that, God willing, my son would be cured. By June 15, my son showed some sign of hearing but there was no improvement in his eye sight.

"One day during my evening prayer before Guruvayurappan, I had a vision of the deity in all the splendour of the evening arati. My eyes wer blinded with tears of joy. I felt somebody touching my shoulder. It was my wife. She announced with joy that our son's eyesight had been restored."

*Bhakta's problem solved**

Shri Konthi Menon was the manager of the Guruvayur temple during the years 1901-1915. It was his practice to jot down notable incidents in the temple. One such true story recorded by him relates how Guruvayurappan solved a devotee's problem.

N. Krishna Menon who belonged to an affluent orthodox Nair family in Guruvayur, was working in Calcutta as the Managing Director of a British Company. He was the only son of his widowed mother. Mother and son were greatly attached to each other. Every year Menon came down to Guruvayur on a month's leave to stay with his mother and worship at the temple. Both were very pious.

Nair however fell in love with a pretty Anglo-Indian girl working in his company. He wrote to his mother about his intention to register his marriage with her and sought her blessings. The orthodox lady was aghast and wrote back to him not to marry her. Instead, she suggested that he should marry his cousin Rugmini.

Menon dearly loved his mother and he owed everything in life to her. At the same time his love for Margaret was so deep that he could not think of marrying anyone else. So he wrote back to his mother that he would remain a bachelor rather than marry his cousin.

The old lady spent her days in tears and prayers to Guruvayurappan to turn her son's mind away from the

*This and the following three true stories are based on *Miracles of Guruvayurappan* by Puthoor Unnikrishnan, translated by Smt. Parvati Ammal. *Bhavan's Journal*.

Christian girl. So did Menon in his house in Calcutta praying to God to solve the tangle. A true bhakta of Guruvayurappan, Menon kept a marble idol of Krishna in his Calcutta home and prayed that his mother relent and allow him to marry the girl of his choice. He offered a special 21-day puja to achieve his purpose.

One day during his prayer, he felt as if God was speaking to him: "So long as Margaret is a Christian. You may not be able to marry her. So let her become a Hindu, dress and behave like a Nair girl of Kerala. Your mother will certainly accept her then."

Menon took this as divine direction of Guruvayurappan and drove straight to Margaret's parents who virtually kept her away from him after getting her resign the job in Menon's company. Menon pleaded with them that they must try to understand a mother's mind as she was very old and orthodox and would she not reconsider and go with him.

Margaret had no hesitation. In fact she had already become a strict vegetarian and a Hindu. "I am now really the Radha you used to call me. I have been preparing myself to deserve you, if you were ever to accept me", she said.

So, the next Vaisakha month Menon and Margaret reached Guruvayur and prostrated before mother. "What is your name, child?" she asked. "Radha," said Margaret. "I am Radha to your son and he is Krishna to me", she added.

Menon's mother was delighted. She approved of her son's choice and advised them to observe 21 days' bhajan at the temple. But will she be admitted to the temple? Konthi Menon who was approached, advised them to get a certificate from the village authorities that Margaret had adopted Hinduism under the name of Radha. The certificate was produced. Konthi Menon then approached the trustees of the temple, the Zamorin of Calicut and the Mallissery Nambudiri. The marriage was permitted and duly conducted in the temple.

Shri Konthi Menon's diary concludes: "Shri Menon and his mother and his Christian bride are all blessed by Guruvayurappan. I deem it a great fortune to have been an instrument for this divine task."

Lord to their rescue

Nerum Kaitha Kott Ravunni Nair was a poor but devout man, visiting Guruvayur every month. He was a peon in a local government office. With the pittance he got as pay and one acre of paddy land he cultivated, he was hardly able to make both ends meet. Because he had a large family to maintain — his own family, his old mother and a dependent elder sister with her five children.

However, Ravunni Nair celebrated his eldest daughter Devayani's marriage in a grand manner. She was a handsome girl and the bride groom belonged to a respectable family and he had a good job in Bombay. But Ravunni Nair was almost a broke after the marriage and had often to take provision on credit from the nearby provision store owned by Subbaraya Pai.

Late one night, Ravunni Nair was put to a severe test. His daughter, his son-in-law, his mother, sister and her children suddenly arrived by car at his house. They had gone to worship at Guruvayur temple and dropped in at Nair's house on their way back. Nair and his wife were indeed happy to see their daughter's prosperity within a year of the marriage. She even owned a car. They welcomed them wholeheartedly but his wife's meaningful glance sent a chill down Nair's spine. There was not a grain of rice in the house.

"Guruvayurappa, my honour is at stake. Please save me", cried Nair to himself. He got an idea. He would take the few coins from the little box in which he used to put by coins to be taken to Guruvayurappan. With that he would go to Subbaraya Pai's shop and purchase some rice, making part payment.

But on the way, these thoughts assailed him: "Will the shop be closed?" Would he have to go to Subbaraya's house in that case?" "Or if Pai's son was in the shop things would be easy..." and so on.

As he approached the shop, he saw it was not closed and there was a young man at the table counting cash and closing accounts. Nair did not know him. Was he Pai's son-in-law? In any case how could he tell a stranger about his plight?

But as Nair approached him, the young man was all smiles and asked him what he wanted. "I want two measures of rice as I have some guests at home. But I cannot pay in full; I can only pay for a part." said Nair.

"Never mind", said the young man. "I can give you anything you want", he assured. "Do you want anything else? Go home and serve your guests. I shall tell my uncle."

The next day both Ravunni Nair and Pai were surprised as to who helped Nair in his hour of need. Subbaraya Pai said he had no nephew at all. Inscrutable indeed are the ways of God!

Rationalist turns ardent devotee

Parampanthellil Rairu Nair was a hard core rationalist, while his wife was a staunch believer. They were well-to do as Nair had inherited rice fields and coconut groves. Their only daughter was 27. While Smt. Rairu Nair insisted that the marriage, when settled, be conducted at Guruvayur temple, Nair was keen to conduct it in his own house so that he could invite his many friends of all castes and creeds. His wife prayed to God that good sense should dawn upon her husband.

Within a month, Rairu Nair was able to pick upon a good match for his daughter. The young man was Hari Govindan, 40, the only son of Thatchudaya Kaimal, who came of an ancient *tarwad*. Kaimal welcomed the alliance with Rairu Nair's family as it was a respectable one and the girl good-looking. However, Kaimal was a conservative. He believed in horoscopes and desired that the marriage be conducted at Guruvayur temple.

Rairu Nair had no choice but to accept these conditions. He went to the 87-year old Aasan and requested him to come to his house to examine the horoscopes. The

old man obliged though Nair's house lay beyond the rice fields with no regular roads.

Aasan found that the horoscopes agreed very well and advised Nair to conduct the marriage at Guruvayur. When Nair politely told Aasan that he had to entertain his friends of other religions, the latter said: "Oh, that is easily settled. You have your reception at home and let the religious ceremony be held in His presence. The lagnas of the horoscopes ordain it."

Nair simply decided to sleep over the matter. Something would turn up, he thought.

The Aasan had mid-day meal and a short rest after which he decided to leave. But suddenly he felt ill. An ayurvedic physician was urgently summoned. By the time the medicine was prepared it was very late in the evening. As Aasan was keen on returning home that evening he requested that he be carried across the fields.

Rairu Nair had to undertake the mission himself. He helped himself to a good drink and set out. It was nearly six miles and was getting dark, and clouds were gathering in the sky. Nair had hardly gone half the way when there was strong wind, followed by a heavy downpour. Very soon the area was flooded and it was pitch dark. Nair could not proceed as he was caught in waist-deep water.

Panic gripped him and the atheist cried out "Oh God!" The storm continued unabated and Nair felt lost. All his pride left him and he cried in agony and remorse: "Oh, God, spare me at least till my dear daughter's marriage

is over. Oh, Guruvayurappa, I shall conduct her marriage in your presence. Only save me from a watery grave."

Suddenly, he saw a beam of light from a lighted country torch (made of cadjan leaves tied together to serve as a torch in olden days in Kerala). Nair called out: "Oh, who is there, Save me".

The torch-bearer, a strong man, heard his cry and came nearer. He deftly pulled the duo on to hard ground, led them to Aasan's house and bade good bye. Nair was stunned. "Was he the Lord Himself", he wondered.

The marriage went off well at Guruvayur temple itself to the happiness of all, Rairu Nair included! In grateful remembrance Nair donated a big brass lamp to the temple. For the rest of his life, he remained a steadfast devotee of the Lord.

Coconut with four eyes

Annaswamy ran a coconut nursery. One day he got coconut of a rare species at an auction in the Guruvayur temple. He decided to plant it and take the first bunch of coconuts as an offering to Guruvayurappan.

The seed sprouted. Annaswamy tended it with great care. In the fifth year, the first fruit appeared. Anna swamy was happy and made milk offering to the Lord. In due course two sturdy bunches grew. One night, one of the bunches was stolen but there was still one left which was a very big bunch with 18 coconuts.

One day Annaswamy's friend and a distant relative, Venkeechan came on a visit. When he saw the wonderful

coconuts he insisted on getting one for himself to plant. Naturally Annaswamy refused, saying it was for Guruvayurappan and Guruvayurappan only. He won't remove even a single fruit even if Lord Siva were to come, Swamy declared.

Said Venkeechan in derision. "What is so special about your wonderful coconuts? Have they got four eyes and horns?"

Annaswamy would not tolerate such flippant talk. "Who knows?", he argued, "they are Guruvayurappan's and may well have four eyes and horns!"

Venkeechan would not give up. "If your coconuts have four eyes, I shall give you all my wealth", he said.

The two went to the temple together for offering the coconut bunch. Annaswamy made the offering. Then with special permission from the devaswom, in the presence of everyone, one coconut from the bunch was husked and lo! it did have four eyes (instead of the usual three) and a small shoot looking like a horn. Annaswamy broke out in a hymn in praise of the Lord. A large crowd gathered to see the wonderful coconut. Venkeechan was humbled and he prostrated before Annaswamy who told him to prostrate before the Lord.

The coconut was in the store of the temple for a long time. The author of these "miracle" series, Shri Puthoor Unnikrishnan remembers to have seen it when he was very young.

Every devotee of Guruvayurappan has his or her own stories to tell of the Lord's intervention in his or her

favour. In a court judgement, a debtor in a Palghat village with more than half a dozen children was threatened with eviction. A village official, he had a number of friends but no one came to his rescue while the creditor remained obdurate. The official could do nothing but throw himself at the mercy of the Lord by a systematic namajapa for forty days. After the prescribed time limit was over he approached the creditor, who, to his surprise, was so moved by his plight that he completely released the debtor from his obligation. As said earlier, the Lord of Guruvayur very often gives more than what we ask!

A helpless mother in a similar plight was saved by the chance appearance of an advocate friend of the family in court. He raised a new point in her favour. It turned the scales and the High Court's order against the appellant was even reported as clarifying and determining an obscure point in the Law!

One fine morning a horse was found near the eastern gopuram at Guruvayur as an offering to the Lord. There was however no provision for it in the temple as for cows and elephants. So the local authorities of the temple decided to sell the horse and credit the amount to the Lord's accounts. But the Zamorin, residing at Calicut, who was the temple trustee then had to approve it. He approved the proposal as there was no way out of the difficulty. Hardly the ink was dry, a message came from Guruvayur that the temple elephant Balakrishnan had broken his chains and run away. Feeling that this must have something to do with the order he had passed, the Zamorin cancelled it. But the problem of the horse remained. While the Zamorin was worried about how to provide for the Lord's horse, a discharged syce came seek-

ing a job! And he was immediately appointed and sent to Guruvayur to take care of the horse.

Prof. Krishna Ayyar reports the case of Parameswara Pattar of Pallavar village in Palghat district who had an attack of cholera while on a pilgrimage to Guruvayur. In those days (1900) there was no cure for Cholera. In his despair, Parameswara Pattar placed his purse before the Lord and prayed. Only Bhagavan could give him the courage and by sheer courage the patient recovered from his dreaded illness!

Unnikrishna Concept

More than Bhakti to the Lord of Guruvayur, the prevailing bhava in Guruvayur is Vatsalya or parental affection, the attitude of dependence as on Father or Mother. In the age of Sanskrit, as in the *Tantrasamucchaya*, the authoritative text book of the 15th century, we see the Lord only as Mahavishnu shining with the brilliance of a thousand suns. The Unnikrishna conception of Mahavishnu came into prominence with Poontanam's *Jnanappana*, which became more and more popular.

Kururamma's Kanaakenam — See I must the little one — is attributed to Poontanam's concept. In spite of all his teasing, Unnikrishna remained Vilvamangalam's favourite. It was as Unnikrishna that Prince Manavedan saw the Lord playing under the Elanji tree. Interestingly, the peculiar custom of fireworks not being allowed within the temple walls is because it would frighten Unnikrishna! However elephants which frighten children everywhere are freely allowed here because children are accustomed to these animals from infancy. As for *annapras-*

nam, it is a sight which even gods would envy, with hundreds of fathers seated in a row, with their children on the lap, the proud mother standing behind and the outspread plantain leaf served with *palpayasam* and other eatables!

Nowadays, couples come in hundreds to have their wedlock solemnised before the Lord to ensure a happy married life. With every one looking at their best, with their beaming face and glittering jewels, there is no room in Guruvayur for anything but joy and happiness. Indeed, in the words of Prof. Krishna Ayyar, "So surcharged is the atmosphere with love and affection that the hardest heart cannot but melt and the foulest heart cannot but become pure while within its walls. So those who come with tears in their eyes go back with smiles on their face. Guruvayur is literally Vaikuntha, a place without any Kuntitha or worry".

His first and last namaskar

As namacharya Anjam wrote*: "Let no one imagine that with Krishna's ascent to heaven (swargarohana), his blessings have ceased to flow to the earth. He has made the temple of Guruvayur his abode where he still shines in all his glory, redeeming particularly the fallen. There can be no more remarkable illustration of it than the story of Chelaparamb Nambudiri who, in one namaskar, was called to eternal rest."

In the impetuosity of youth Chelaparamb gave himself up to sensuous pursuits. His rambles took him to Guruvayur but he remained impervious to the divine

*Based on the article, "Single namaskar won mercy for sinner", by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri - *The Sunday Standard*.

presence and his career of profligacy and vice went on unabated. During his long stay there, he never once had a good look at the Lord or gave ear to the inspiring expositions of the Lord's lilas.

One day, when devotees came to the temple tank to wash their hands after the noon feast provided at the temple, they found Chelaparamb leisurely having an oil bath. Seeing that he was not giving a thought to the Lord, one of the devotees addressed him: "Oh! Chelaparamb, you have all the advantages of birth and also the great good fortune of coming to this Vaikuntha on earth. Yet, you are throwing away a high human birth for nothing".

"No sin can be more heinous than this", said another. "It is a great pity that even at this advanced age, you are clinging to a dissipated life. Realise now at least that the Lord in his unbounded mercy waits for you. Seek him, surrender to him!"

Remorse

These words produced a revolution in Chelaparamb's mind. His thoughts ran: "To what depths have I fallen. Not a person can be found in these precincts without the Lord's name on the lips. But I never gave a chance to do so. Instead, I found pleasure in the company of the vulgar, and loved to listen to their gossip. What hope is there for one who has so grievously erred? My sins cannot be washed off even by a whole life spent in repentance and retribution".

Tears rolled down his cheeks with these thoughts. Simultaneously a ray of hope flashed through his mind.

In a moment, in drenched clothes, he was seen running into the presence of Guruvayurappan. The people around could not believe their eyes. But there he was, standing before the doors of the sanctuary of the Lord!

It was the sacred hour of the noon-puja of Guruvayurappan. Bhaktas waited in single-minded devotion to catch a glimpse of the Lord on the re-opening of the doors of the *Srikoil* with the refrain of 'Narayana Nama' proceeding from their throats.

Chelaparamb too cried: "Guruvayurappa, Narayana, Bhakta Vatsala! A glance of mercy from you and I am blessed! True, I have not done anything in my long life to merit it. But does it matter? Boundless is thy love and certainly there is hope even for me..."

Dhruva had demonstrated that the Lord's grace could be obtained in a period of six months. The great emperor Parikshit needed only seven days to achieve it. Pingala, the notorious harlot could secure it in an hour and a half, while King Khatwanga realised it in just forty-eight minutes.

Chelaparamb regretted that in his ninety years of his life he had never given a thought to the Lord and prostrated himself on the mandapam. It was his first and last namaskar to the Lord. He never rose again. In less than a moment Guruvayurappan had received him!

The marvel of the assembled bhaktas knew no bounds and the whole atmosphere resounded with 'Narayana Nama'.

It happened about seventy years ago and was heard from those who were eyewitness.

Venkataraman, a poor Brahmin from Palghat, came to Guruvayur in search of a livelihood. He did odd jobs for shop-keepers in the east *nada* and earned a pittance that was not enough even for his *pan*.

In this manner he spent nearly five years in Guruvayur during which time he did not enter the temple even once with any sincere devotion. But almost every day he ate the meal served in the *uttuapura* and went away without any thought of the deity.

One evening he happened to join the throng of devotees at the time of the *diparadhana*. The doors of the sanctorum were about to open. Full-throated chants of 'Narayana', 'Narayana' filled the air.

Venkataraman was moved by all this. He too uttered the name of the Lord with the rest and circumambulated the sanctum. On the northern *vatilmatam* a scholar was reciting the Bhagavata. He was none other than the famed Bhagavatottama Kudallore Kunjikkavu Nambudiripad. The assembled devotees, as usual, were listening to him with rapt attention. Venkataraman also joined the audience.

The discourse over, Venkataraman prostrated himself at the feet of the Nambudiripad. With tears in his eyes he confessed: "Though I have heard about your greatness I was till now under the impression that the recitation of the Bhagavata, *namasankirtana*, etc., has no

meaning and were only meant to deceive others with a pretence of bhakti. In the company of evil men I have even spoken derisively about you. Kindly forgive me and bless me that at least the remaining years of my life may be spent in contemplation of the Lord."

Sri Kunjikkavu consoled him and said: "You have already been redeemed from all sins by your devotion to Sri Guruvayurappan. Listening to the Bhagavata, chanting the Lord's name, etc., is given only to those who are blessed on account of their good deeds in previous births. One need not renounce one's family or give up one's normal pursuits to become a true devotee. But whatever one does should be performed with devotion and the thought of God should be rooted in our minds. You are indeed fortunate to have resorted to Guruvayurappan."

From then on, the path was illumined for Venkataraman. He soon realised that mental peace which everyone seeks can easily be had through daily worship of the Lord, hearing about His lilas and chanting His name. His prayer to Sri Guruvayurappan was:

Anāyāsena maraṇam

vinā dainyena jīvanam

Dehi me kṛpaya kṛṣṇa

Tvayi bhaktimacāñcalām

["A life without hardships and an end that is peaceful. This is all I ask of you, Krishna, and unswerving devotion for you."]

Venkataraman passed about five years as a changed man. It was the month of Vrischika and the holy Ekadasi festival had just been celebrated. Two days later, it was again the Bhagavata discourse by Sri Kunjikkavu Nam-budiripad. It was now conducted at 3 p.m. instead of at dusk, for the convenience of the devotees who had gathered in their thousands. The venue however was the same — the northern *vatilmatam*.

Venkataraman, who every day made obeisance to Sri Kunjikkavu at the end of the discourse, however, got up a little earlier that day, bowed and walked towards the *Srikoil*. There he fell prostrate with his head towards the deity. He remained in the same posture for a long time. The other devotees thought that he was in a state of ecstasy in which everything else is forgotten. But lo! he lay motionless like a log. People soon realised that Venkataraman was dead, that he attained the feet of Lord Guruvayurappan - the "*anayasena maranam*" which he had been praying for every day.

Indeed, it was a revealing moment — people experiencing the living presence of the Lord who once again demonstrated the truth of what He preached in the Gita.

Ananyāścintayanto mām

Ye janāḥ paryupāsate

Teṣām nityābhīyuktānām

Yogakṣemam vahāmyaham

[To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, who are ever devout, I provide gain and security.]

Those who go to Guruvayur and pray to the deity there attain *ananyabhakti* and eventually see His form and attain union with it.

Aum Namō Narayanaya

Aum Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya

APPENDIX

Puja Timings

Details in this appendix are based on the information pamphlet published by Guruvayur Devaswom for the guidance of the devotees

The timings of daily pujas are broadly as follows:

The temple opens at 3 a.m.

3 a.m. to 3.20 a.m.	: Nirmalaya darshan
3.20 a.m. to 3.30 a.m.	: Thailabhishekam, Vaka Charthu, Sankhabhishekam
3.30 a.m. to 4.15 a.m.	: Malar Naivedyam, Alankaram
4.15 a.m. to 4.30 a.m.	: Usha Naivedyam
4.30 a.m. to 6.15 a.m.	: Ethirettupuja followed by ushahpuja
6.15 a.m. to 7.00 a.m.	: Seeveli
7.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m.	: Milk abhishekam, Navakha- bhishekam Pantiradi Naivedyam and Puja
11.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.	: Uchha Puja (The Noon Pooja)

The temple is closed between 12.30 and 4.30 p.m.

The temple re-opens at 4.30 p.m.

4.30 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.	: Seeveli
6.15 p.m. to 6.45 p.m.	: Deeparadhana

7.30 p.m. to 7.45 p.m.	: Athazhapuja Naivedyam
7.45 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.	: Athazhapuja
8.45 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.	: Athazha Seeveli
9.00 p.m. to 9.15 p.m.	: Tripuka and the Ola-vayana (a customary function of reading out the days income and expenses before the Lord)
9.15 p.m.	: The Sreekoil is closed. On the days of special illumi- nations called "Vilakku" the Tripuka is performed only after that.

Note: On the days when Udayasthamana Puja is performed there will be some variations in the above puja routine.

GLOSSARY

<i>Avatara</i>	. .	Incarnation
<i>Adharma</i>	. .	Sin, unrighteous action, opposite of dharma
<i>Annaprasana</i>	. .	Feeding with rice; the term usually refers to the first ceremonial feeding of a child with solid food
<i>Appan</i>		Father
<i>Aarati</i>		The concluding rite of a puja in which lamps are lit to the deity called Deeparadhana
<i>Arddhamandapa</i>		Raised platform in front of the sanctum
<i>Aarattu</i>		Bathing festival
<i>Agrasala</i>		Dining hall
<i>Athazham</i>		Food offerings at night
<i>Abhishekam</i>		Rite of bathing the deity
<i>Ambalavasi</i>		Temple attendant
<i>Archana</i>		Offer of flowers to the deity
<i>Ashrama</i>		Hermitage, also one of the four prescribed stages of life
<i>Bhakti</i>		Devotion to God, loyalty, faith
<i>Bhakta</i>		Devotee
<i>Belikkallu</i>		Altar
<i>Bhajan</i>		Worship; also devotional singing

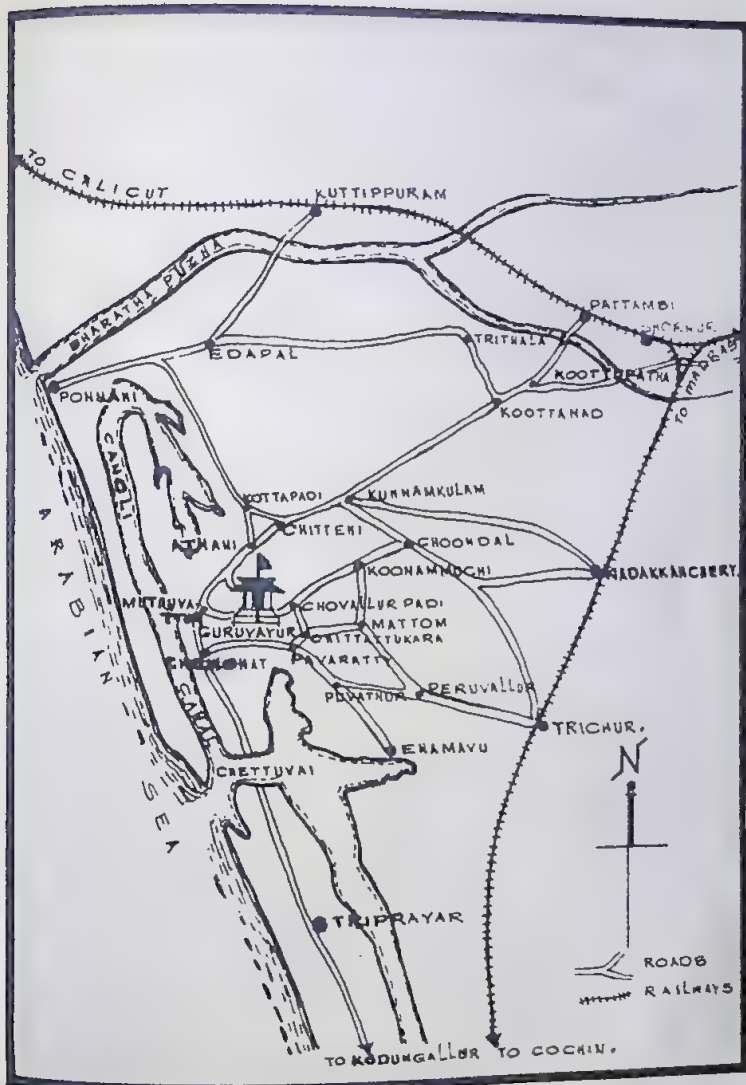
<i>Bhaktavatsala</i>	One to whom a devotee is dear-the deity one worships
<i>Bhiksha</i>	Alms
<i>Chamara</i>	Fly-whisk
<i>Chuttambalam</i>	The structure around the sanctum, also known as Nalambalam
<i>Devaswom</i>	The authority which administers a temple
<i>Darshan</i>	Glimpse of the Lord
<i>Divya-Mangala-Swarupa</i>	Godly and auspicious form
<i>Dharma</i>	Moral law, duty as laid down by religion or custom
<i>Deepasthambha</i>	Pillar of lights
<i>Dwajasthambha</i>	Flag-staff
<i>Deeparadhana</i>	Aarati
<i>Darbha</i>	Sacred grass used in religious rites
<i>Ekadasi</i>	The eleventh day of the noon
<i>Garbhagriha</i>	<i>Sanctum Sanctorum</i>
<i>Gopuram</i>	Tower built at one of the gateways to a temple
<i>Gurudakshina</i>	Offering (fee paid) to the teacher
<i>Illam</i>	Nambudiri household
<i>Jnana</i>	Spiritual knowledge, realisation
<i>Jnani</i>	A knower of reality

<i>Janma</i>	Birth
<i>Kaliyuga</i>	The age of Kali, one of the four sons according to the Hindu cycle of time
<i>Kuttu</i>	Literally dance
<i>Kuttambalam</i>	Temple of dance, auditorium attached to a temple
<i>Kumbha</i>	Sacred Waterpot
<i>Kizhusanti</i>	Assistant priest
<i>Kalabhabhishekam</i>	An ointment with sandal paste
<i>Lila</i>	Play; the inexplicable ways of Providence
<i>Lakshana</i>	Sign
<i>Mulasthanam</i>	Base
<i>Mandapam</i>	Raised platform or pavilion
<i>Madappalli</i>	Temple Kitchen
<i>Matilakam</i>	Temple courtyard
<i>Malar</i>	Puffed rice
<i>Melsanti</i>	Head priest
<i>Muhurtam</i>	Auspicious moment or hour
<i>Moksha</i>	Liberation from the cycle of birth and death; salvation
<i>Nirmalyam</i>	The previous day's decorations still on the Lord; also immaculate
<i>Naivedyam</i>	Food offering to the Lord
<i>Nada</i>	Gateway

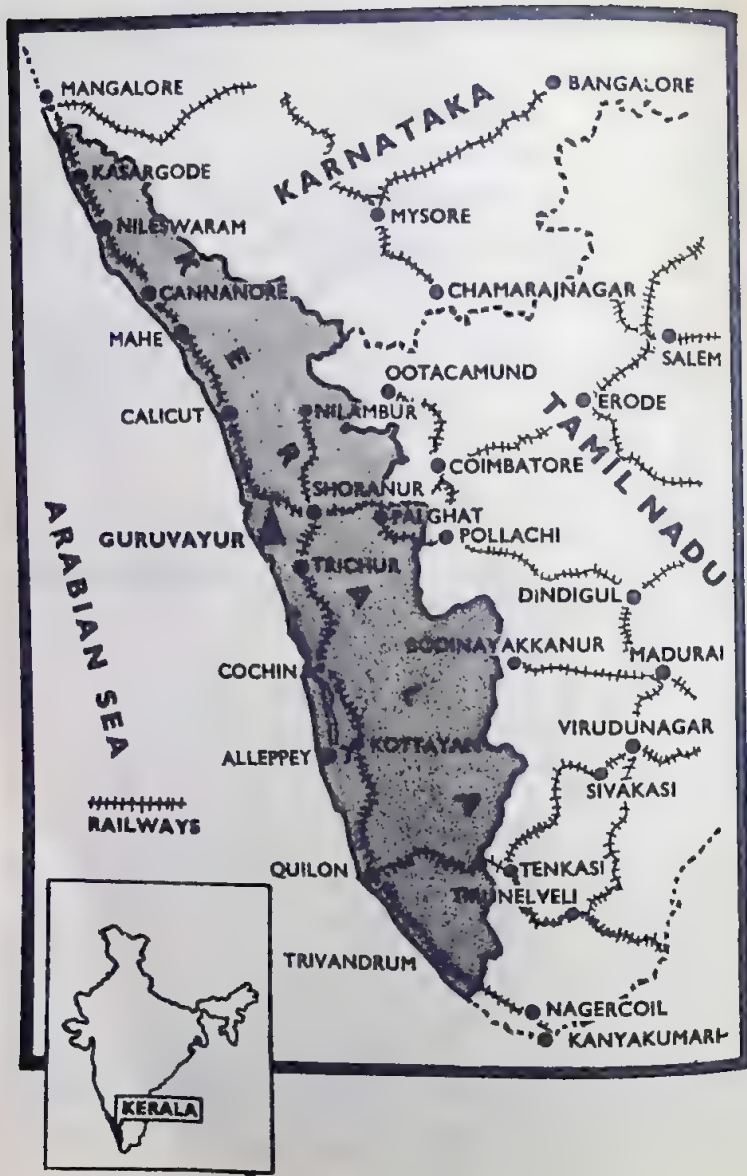
<i>Nalambalam</i>	The structure around the sanctum; cloister (also called Chuttambalam)
<i>Namasankirtana</i>	Singing the praises of the Lord
<i>Nirapara</i>	Offer of a measure of rice for the deity
<i>Otikkan</i>	Chanter of Vedas
<i>Ola</i>	Palm-leaf
<i>Puja</i>	Worship
<i>Prakara</i>	The pathway around the sanctum for circumambulation
<i>Prasnam</i>	Astrological investigation
<i>Prasadam</i>	Literally, divine grace; food or flowers offered to the deity distributed to the devotees
<i>Purana</i>	Sacred legend
<i>Pratishtha</i>	Installation
<i>Panchagavya</i>	A mixture of cow's milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung
<i>Pattayapura</i>	Granary
<i>Pallivetta</i>	Hunting expedition of the Lord
<i>Prema</i>	Love, devotion
<i>Satram</i>	Dormitory for pilgrims
<i>Swargarohanam</i>	Ascent to celestial regions
<i>Sattvic</i>	One of the three Gunas, this being the most virtuous

<i>Sastra</i>	Sacred lore, science
<i>Sloka</i>	Couplet or Quatrain in Sanskrit
<i>Srikoil, Srikovil</i>	Sanctum Sanctorum
<i>Satyaloka</i>	Celestial region where Brahma resides
<i>Siveli</i>	Procession of the Deity
<i>Sopanam</i>	Steps leading to the Sanctum
<i>Salagrama</i>	Sacred stone found in the river bed of the Gandak in Nepal and worshipped by Vaishnavas
<i>Sraddha</i>	Death Anniversary
<i>Stotras</i>	Hymns of praises
<i>Utsavam</i>	Temple Festival
<i>Utsava Vighraha</i>	Processional deity
<i>Ushah</i>	Early morning
<i>Uchcha</i>	Noon
<i>Udayastamana</i>	From Sunrise to Sunset
<i>Uttupura</i>	Dining Hall
<i>Utsavabai</i>	Oblations made to altars during festivals.
<i>Uri</i>	A suspended net holding curd pots and other utensils
<i>Viswarupa</i>	Cosmic form
<i>Vaikuntha</i>	Celestial abode of Mahavishnu
<i>Vazhivadu</i>	Offerings to the deity

<i>Vilakkumatam</i>	Wooden framework with rows of lamps surrounding the cloister
<i>Vatilmata</i>	Raised platforms for feeding devotees
<i>Varna</i>	Caste
<i>Vilakku</i>	Festival of lights, usually including Elephant procession
<i>Vrata</i>	Penance; observation of austerities.



RAIL AND ROAD CONNECTING GURUVAYUR
 Courtesy : Guruvayur Devaswom





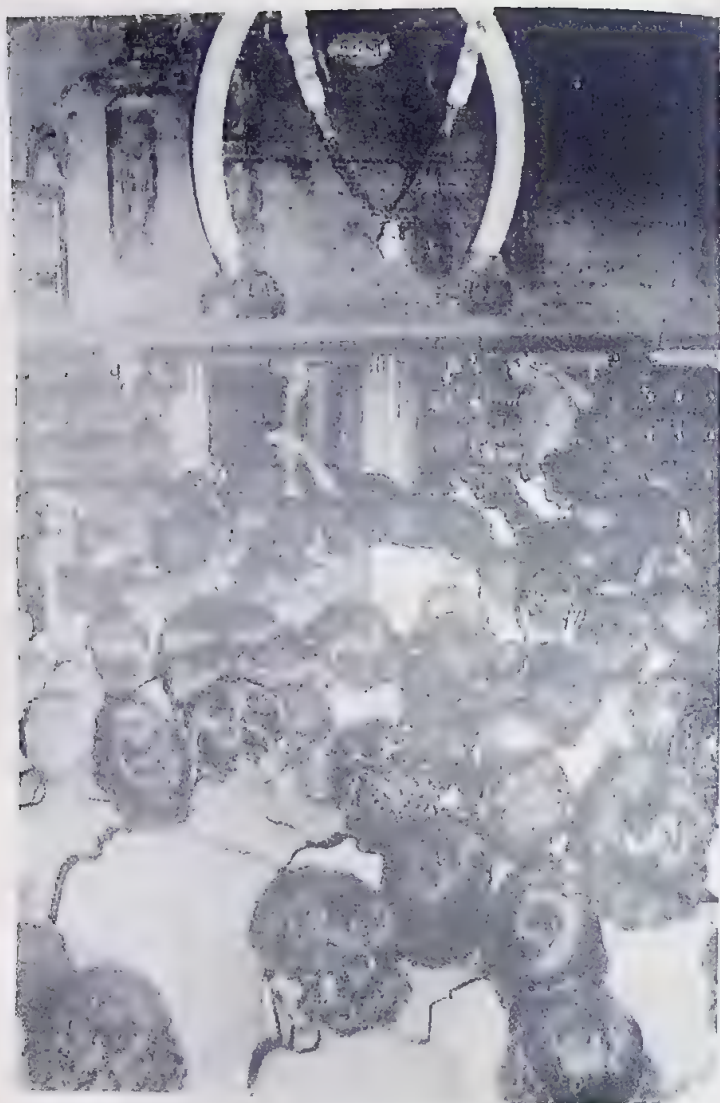
Welcome to Guruvayur - The peepul tree with the huge Garuda at its foot, hallowed by the devotion of Manjula, is the first to greet devotees who approach the Guruvayur temple from the east.



The eastern and main gateway of the temple with the majestic *dipastambha* (pillar of lights) in foreground. A sanskrit inscription on one of the temple walls says that the temple within is heaven.. and had been trodden by the feet of many kings.



The gateway is surmounted by two storied gopuram. The porch and pillars are elaborately carved and walls covered with paintings. Next to gopuram is the lofty flag-staff seen in the back ground.



The scramble for the coveted *nirmalya* darshan of Guruvayurappan in His transcendental glory, the cynosure of all eyes, the focus of all attention, the idol of all hearts.



The Srikoil or *garbagriha* (sanctum sanctorum), square in shape, has two storeys with sloping roofs. The walls have paintings depicting episodes from the life of Sri Krishna.



The beautiful sculpture of Anantasayanam (the Lord reclining on the serpent) on the west side of the *nalamalam* behind *Srikoil*.
This replaces the old painting destroyed by the 1970 fire.



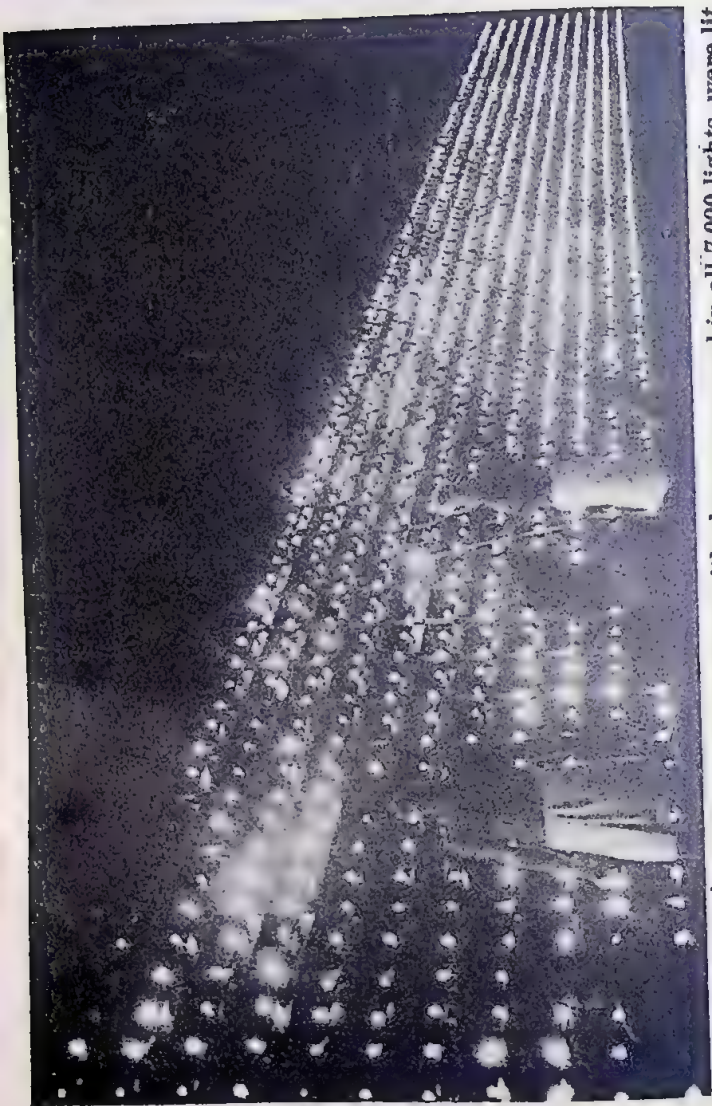
Adjoining the temple in the north is the temple tank, Rudratirtha, referred to by Meppatur as the "charming lake" in describing the episode of King Prachetas. The idol is bathed here during *aarattu* marking the end of the 10-day utsavam in Kumbham (February-March)



The disastrous all-round raging fire in 1970 did not destroy the idol of Guruvayurappan, the greatest miracle in modern times. Hindus, Muslims and Christians fought the furious fire shoulder to shoulder.



H.H. Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati Swami of Kanchi arrives at Guruvayur to lay the foundation stone for the renovation of the temple which started on 1st May 1971.



Lead Kindly Light.... The *Vilakkumatam* with eleven rows and in all 7,000 lights, were lit for the first time after the fire, on April 14, 1973 (Vishnu Day). The renovation work was completed on October 31, 1974.



**The utsava vigraha, processional deity
being taken out by the priest for *Siveli***



The *Siveli* with the utsava vighraha mounted on the elephant. The procession of the Lord is conducted three times a day, led by 12 lighted silver lamps, pipes and drums. *Siveli* is

Sribali, making offerings to Lord's celestial attendants.



Eager, fervent worshippers with breath held back, palm joined to palm on the chest, pointing towards the Lord, fill to the full with sound of Holy names - Govinda, Hare, Krishna, Narayana and the like, as in superb Vaikuntha



Fruit of thy prayer.... Devotees receive tirtha, oil used in abhishekam and sandal paste at the counter on the northern side of the temple.



***Tulabharam*, a common vow in which the devotee is weighed against articles, which are donated to the deity. A phenomenon witnessed at Guruvayur in recent years in the increasing number of non-Hindus making this offering.**



**Marriages are made in Guruvayur...Such is the faith that hundreds of couples are united
in wedlock every day before the Lord to ensure a happy married life.**



Annaprasanam - the first feeding ceremony with hundreds of fathers seated in a row, with their children in lap, the proud mother standing behind and the outspread plantain leaf served with *palpayasam*, is a sight which even gods might envy!



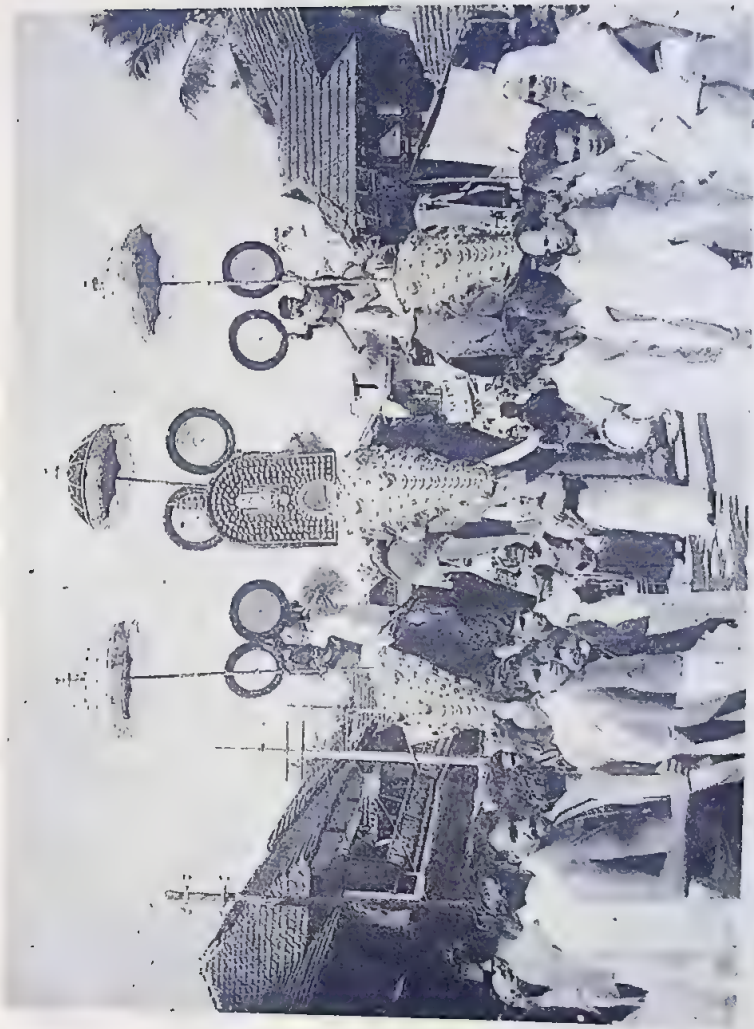
Every day is a day of festivities in Guruvayur - *nitya kalayam* *pacchathoranam*. But there are occasions, which are marked by special celebrations, pomp and grandeur and decorations



The Lord's *thidambu* is being mounted on the elephant as the procession is about to start.



A sight for the gods! The procession of elephants during the 10-day utsavam with *chenda melam*, a celestial symphony of drum, and pipes.



On the concluding day of the Ekadasi festival, the Lord comes out of the temple in procession to give darshan to the multitudes



Bhagavata discourse by Namacharya Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri in the august presence of His Holiness Sankracharya. "To Sri Guruvayurappan nothing is more pleasing than the recitation of the Bhagavata, says Paramacharya.



The playful Krishna of Guruvayur has collected over forty elephants mostly donated by devotees. Some selected elephants are ready to take part in the elephant race which marks the beginning of the 10-day utsavam.



The elephant which arrives first within the temple walls stay there for the duration of the festival, receiving royal threatment, carrying the Lord's *thidambu*.

SRI KRISHNA, THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR

Mr Vaidyanathan gives a comprehensive account of the temple, its origin, the architecture and the legends about it, daily rites, the festivals around the year and a variety of other details the devotees are hungry to know...

— *Free Press Journal.*

Mr Vaidyanathan's effort brings within a handy volume all the answers that every visitor to Guruvayur seeks.

— *The Times of India.*

In this informative book, the author has provided what everyone would like to know about this shrine.

— *The Hindu.*

...writes with feeling and sincerity.

— *Femina.*

The book is a treat for millions of Guruvayur worshippers.

— *Evening News of India.*

"*Lilas of Guruvayurappan*" form the longest chapter and easily the most engrossing part of the book.

— *Free Press Bulletin.*

The book is exceedingly well written..

— *The Mail.*

Written with great fervour... The book is bound to arouse a new awakening.

— *The Economic Times.*

Author of two other Bhavan's books, *Pilgrimage to Sabari and Temples & Legends of Kerala*, *K.R.Vaidyanathan* retired from the Indian Railways after four decades of service. Since then he has been writing for various newspapers and journals and has also authored a book on railway humour.